



# HARD TIMES REMEMBERED

A Study of the Depression in  
McMinn County



Mars Hill Church,  
Athens,  
Daily Post-Athenian,  
September 11, 1939

1

CCC  
youth planting  
pine  
seedlings

2

Tennessee Motor Co.,  
Daily Post-Athenian, ad,  
September 11, 1939

3

Franklin  
Delano  
Roosevelt

4

Epperson Hospital,  
Daily Post-Athenian,  
September 11, 1939  
(built in 1936)

5

Ford V-8, \$510,  
Daily Post-Athenian ad,  
August 10, 1936

6

Wisebram's Dept. Store,  
Daily Post-Athenian ad,  
September 11, 1939

7

Party at home of  
Mrs. Mary B. Spahr, 1939

8

Minnie  
Louise  
Snyder

10

L&N Depot,  
Etowah,  
during the 1930's

9

Wheat thresher  
with steam engine,  
J.W. Trew farm  
1930's

11

Blue eagle  
logo of the  
NRA

12

Locomotive  
at Etowah L&N  
yards in 1930's

13

Downtown Etowah  
during the 1930's

14

# **HARD TIMES REMEMBERED**

**A Study of the Depression  
in  
McMinn County**

**Edited by  
Bill Akins  
Genevieve Wiggins**

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## INTRODUCTION

This book is the result of a unique community effort based on hard work, determination, and the dedication of several citizens. In the fall of 1982, the East Tennessee Historical Society received a \$10,000 grant from the Tennessee Committee for the Humanities to conduct community history projects in two counties — Bradley and McMinn. Entitled “Hard Times Remembered,” the project, modeled after a system developed in England some 20 years ago, was designed to take a retrospective look at the Great Depression on a local level; but its major purpose was to instruct a largely adult out-of-school audience in the proper methods and approaches of “doing history.” In each county, approximately 25 volunteers were trained at workshops in the proper methods of historical research by professional historians and related humanities scholars from the ETHS and area universities and colleges.

Thus properly trained, volunteers from each community went “into the field” for approximately nine months of research. One group searched for information on home life during the Depression, while another studied the impact of hard times on local churches. Other researchers examined local government, schools (both black and white), New Deal agencies, and several other aspects of community life in the 1930s. After hundreds of hours of research in newspapers, local, state, and federal documents, church and school records, old photographs, and scores of oral interviews, the volunteers pieced together a fascinating picture of life and events in their community some 50 years ago. The chapters of this book, written by selected volunteers, are the result of their research efforts.

**Hard Times Remembered: A Study of the Depression in McMinn County** indicates that proper historical research and good writing need not be the sole domain of professional historians. Working together as a team, businessmen, school teachers, students, housewives, secretaries, and retired people have put together an excellent study of a very crucial time in their community’s history. What they have done can serve as a model for communities anywhere that are interested in delving into their past in an effective and meaningful way. By participating in such projects, citizens can give themselves and future generations an awareness and understanding of the past that might be otherwise neglected and lost. Furthermore they will develop skills that can be used in future projects of their own initiative.

As is true of any project of this scope, several individuals and organizations have contributed to its success. A special word of thanks goes to the Tennessee Committee for the Humanities for supporting this project with a generous grant. TCH Executive Director Robert Cheatham and Grants Administrator Martha B. Starin have been particularly helpful and supportive. Dr. Charles W. Johnson of the History Department of the University of Tennessee set the proper stage for the project

by sharing his expertise on the history of the Great Depression and New Deal. Jesse Mills, TVA librarian, provided valuable assistance in locating useful statistical material and illustrations. Thanks are extended to the Athens Kiwanis Club, Athens Rotary Club, Alpha Lambda Chapter - Alpha Delta Kappa, Etowah Lions Club, Niota Civic Club, Crescent Hosiery Mills, Niota, the Dycho Company, Inc., Niota, and James E. Burn for adding financial support to the project.

The key to a project of this type, however, is local leadership. The East Tennessee Historical Society intentionally chose McMinn County as one of the project communities because of the strength of the McMinn County Historical Society and the deep appreciation for history that exists in the county. Everyone who is listed in this book as a researcher or writer has made a major contribution to the project. Laura Brown has not only shown her skills as a writer, but also as a talented editor of illustrations. Colonel W.W. Eledge has given yeoman service in collecting interviews and providing his own fascinating insights into the decade of the thirties. Jeanne Taggart, in addition to preparing a chapter on the churches, and Donna Stockton, besides conducting research, have both made numerous other contributions to the project. Genevieve Wiggins, Professor of English at Tennessee Wesleyan College, prepared an excellent chapter on Wesleyan's Depression experience and also contributed her skillful editorial hand throughout. Finally, enough praise cannot be given to Bill Akins, president of the McMinn County Historical Society and local director for the project, who worked tirelessly to insure the success of "Hard Times." He not only assembled a smooth-running local organization — delegating responsibilities and work effectively — but he has spent countless hours, after a full day's work at Mayfield Dairy, reading microfilmed newspapers, searching government documents, conducting interviews, and then serving as a good editor in his own right. For his hard work and dedication, and the many contributions of the other "Hard Times" volunteers, we are forever grateful.

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## Preface

The Great Depression was a traumatic experience for the American people. Never before had so many been so adversely affected for so long as a result of the economic collapse in 1929. It was awful. It turned people's lives upside down and wrong side out. It was a twelve-year-long nightmare.

The Depression did not affect McMinn County to the extent that it did some other parts of the United States. Certainly times were hard and there was much suffering in the county; many people lost their jobs, some losing everything they had, including homes, farms, and businesses. Still there were no soup lines nor "Hoovervilles" nor people living off garbage heaps such as existed in many areas of the country.

A major reason McMinn County fared somewhat better was due to its rural character. The county, with a population of 29,019, was still largely rural during the 1930's with nearly fifty per cent of the population living on farms as owners or tenants. While lack of money was a major problem for this segment of the population, food was not. Many of those living in towns had garden plots or had relatives or friends living on the land, thus having ready access to a means of food that many living in metropolitan areas did not. The accessibility of land on which to grow their own food supply, along with the willingness and need of a large number of farmers to employ a considerable number of farm workers who were usually paid in foodstuff, kept suffering to a minimum in the county during the early Depression years and until the Roosevelt administration put its relief programs in place.

The Depression affected McMinn County differently. Some sections, particularly Etowah and Englewood, were extremely hard hit, while Athens, with a broader economic base, fared much better. Niota represented the brightest spot in the economic picture, having virtually full employment throughout the Depression. Calhoun and Riceville were without an industrial base, serving primarily as trading centers for farmers in the area.

Individuals also were affected differently. While many people in McMinn County recall that everybody was "in the same boat" during the 1930's, this was not exactly a true reflection of reality. Some lives were drastically altered by the Depression while others were relatively unchanged. Stories abound of loss of a home or business, of inadequate food, mounting debts, a reduced standard of living, "hand-outs," of wearing shabby clothing, all of which contributed to a feeling of hopelessness and despondency and left deep psychological scars still remembered painfully today. On the other hand, many remembered their lives in the 1930's as not much different from the 1920's, noting that "you don't miss what you never had." To those unaccustomed to luxuries in the 1920's and used to "just getting by," the Depression years, although difficult, did not

represent a major change or crisis in their lives. For others, the Depression presented an opportunity to get ahead. Those who had money or had access to money, or who held a steady job, were able to take advantage of depressed prices for goods, services, and property and thus continued to live well during the 1930's and in several cases even to accumulate a measure of wealth.

Not only did the Depression wreak havoc upon lives of individuals, but it also created stresses and strains upon various institutions of the county. Business and industry, local government, churches, schools, and the family all were severely tested.

Despite the devastation hard times heaped upon the lives of people, the Depression also had its bright side. It brought forth a burst of energy, creativity, ingenuity, and a kind of spiritual re-awakening throughout the populace. Hard times compelled people to practice rigid economy, to conserve and to make use of what they had, and taught them that they could do without many things thought necessary before. It brought families, neighbors, and friends closer together and fostered a spirit of cooperation and of sharing. As one local observer noted, the Depression caused people to exhibit "more love than any time before or since." Certainly without this outpouring of love and concern for one another, the pain and suffering of the Depression would have been much greater in McMinn County.

The election of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932 did much to buoy the spirit of many McMinn Countians. Although the county remained loyal to its Republican tradition in the election, the New Deal programs inaugurated by Roosevelt were a source of great relief to the county. Almost every segment of the population was touched in one fashion or another by the New Deal. Its programs were a boom to the local economy, providing jobs and putting money into empty pockets.

Although the New Deal did not end the Depression—it did not end until defense spending stimulated the economy in 1941—it brought hope and encouragement. McMinn Countians were grateful to the Roosevelt administration, but it was not until the election of 1940 that they were grateful enough to surrender their political allegiance to it.

The focus of this study is the impact the Great Depression had on the lives of people and institutions in McMinn County. It seeks to describe how this rural East Tennessee county managed to cope with one of the greatest calamities in the history of the United States.

Bill Akins

# **Chapter 1**

## **The Crisis Years: 1929-1933**

**By Carol Tullock**

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The financial crisis that rocked the nation as a result of the stock market collapse in October 1929 was not viewed with particular alarm in McMinn County, nor were the effects immediately felt. The economic turmoil suffered by much of the country was seen as a temporary setback only and most McMinn Countians optimistically looked forward to a bright decade ahead.

Local residents had good cause for their optimism at the beginning of 1930. Business, farming, employment, and general prosperity was reported as "good" and there had been no major economic interruptions. Bank assets throughout the county were impressive and local bankers joined in the optimism. The First National Bank of Etowah ran a newspaper advertisement captioned "The Dawn of a Brighter Decade." T.W. Cantrell, president of the People's Bank of Etowah, declared a six percent dividend to 1929 stockholders, stating that the bank had just completed the most prosperous year in its history. The building industry was doing well. New dwellings and business houses were going up. The Athens Plow Company and the Athens Stove Company were planning expansions. A new hospital was under construction in Athens, and the one that had recently opened in Etowah was doing a thriving business. The city of Athens planned several improvements including a new sewage system, street lighting, and street and sidewalk construction.<sup>1</sup>

By the fall of 1930, however, things began to change. Retail sales were down, unemployment was rising, and jobless men were seeking relief. Representatives from the Charity Association called on the Athens Board of Aldermen to find ways of assisting the unemployed. A program of relief was instituted in early 1931 providing jobs for several unemployed men to work on city streets at \$1.00 a day, one-half to be paid by the city and the other by the Charity Association, with a maximum expenditure of \$400 by each organization.<sup>2</sup>

Farmers, already financially pressed, were also seeking relief. The 1920's had not been good years insofar as farm prices were concerned and the early 1930's were even worse. By the spring of 1933, farm prices had dropped 64 percent while prices of manufactured goods fell only 34 percent. The situation of C.E. Smith, a prominent farmer at Sanford, illustrated the plight of many farmers in 1932. He sold some old cows for \$5 to \$10 apiece. At that rate, he pointed out, it would take 60 to 75 cows just to pay his taxes. He offered to sell part of his land, but at the current value of \$8 an acre, it would take 75 acres to pay the tax — if he could find a buyer. A *Daily Post-Athenian* editorial suggested a practical solution to the farmer's lack-of-cash dilemma: "There's no way around it — taxes will have to be put on a corn basis; the farmer can't get 25 cents for his corn."<sup>3</sup>



Tractors such as this Case, operated by J.K. Pickens, Claxton Community, began to replace the mule as a source of power for the farmer in the thirties.

Courtesy of Mortimer Trew





A severe drought in 1931 further compounded the farmer's problems. Fortunately a federal drought relief law provided some aid; a total of \$16,800 was paid to 251 farmers — an average of \$67 per farm. The year 1931 marked the bottom of the Depression for McMinn farmers. Farm prices fell to an all time low. Tenant-farmer Leonard Truelove raised 14 bales of cotton, but with cotton bringing only five cents a pound, his net profit, after paying \$1 per 300 pounds to get his cotton picked, was only \$50. One-fourth of his cotton crop and one-third of his corn crop went for rent.<sup>4</sup>

Farmers were most likely to lose their land in 1931. According to a report by the McMinn County Farm Loan Association, one in nine delinquent loans resulted in foreclosure; during the following year, the rate dropped to one in 33. The family of Elisha Brient of Englewood lost their farm. Fortunately, they were able to buy part of it back, but they lost several hundred acres.<sup>5</sup>

As the number of cash customers for farm products gradually declined, farmers were forced to alter their practices. In February 1932, County Agent L.M. Amburgy announced a new program designed to develop self-sufficiency and independence. Instead of farming for "dollars," farmers were urged to farm for a "living." This program called for family gardens to provide a continuous supply of vegetables throughout the year. The family meat, egg, and milk supply was to be provided by a brood sow, a flock of hens and a milk cow. Corn and hay were to be raised for livestock rather than having it shipped in from the West. Farmers were advised to raise a variety of cash crops — cotton, tobacco, lambs, wool, eggs, poultry, calves — but only in quantities that could be cared for by the family. Amburgy recommended the planting of cover crops, the use of animal manure, the terracing of eroding land, and the liming of pastures. During a talk to the Athens Kiwanis Club in May 1932, he declared the subsistence farming program a success, citing as evidence the reduction in the number and size of government loans for seed and feed. In 1931, 251 farmers received an average of \$67 for a total of \$16,800; in 1932, 120 farmers received an average of \$42 for a total of \$5,000. A survey of 17 counties indicated that McMinn County farmers were in better financial condition than those of any county except Marion, according to G.I. Wood, member of the government farm loan board.<sup>6</sup>

Evidently many city dwellers liked the county agent's recipe for survival. Some moved back to the country to become tenant farmers or to cultivate previously abandoned acres. Some moved to Dentville, located southwest of Etowah, where they helped run the Trew farms. The Trews, who owned and operated a wheat threshing machine, a mill for wheat and corn, a sawmill and a cotton gin, were in contact with several farmers. The mainstay for farmers, however, was the Trew Store operated by Mortimer Trew. The general store supplied most of the farmers' needs and usually carried them until fall, but an occasional individual would

take two or three years to get his bill paid.<sup>7</sup>

According to Mortimer Trew, those living on farms fared better than those living in town. Although farmers may have found it easier than town dwellers to supply their family's needs, things were by no means easy. When the Depression began, Lee Barker was 20 years old, and all 13 members of his family were living at home. The Barkers raised nearly all of their food. In addition to the work on the family farm, Lee occasionally worked for other farmers for 50 to 75 cents a day. More often, he received a bushel of corn for a day's work. He also earned extra money by cutting crossties which brought \$1 each and by cutting firewood which he sold for \$3 a load.<sup>8</sup>



Trew's General Store, located in Dentville, was a popular trading place for farmers during the Depression.

Courtesy of Mortimer Trew

The E.P. Tullock family were tenant farmers on the well-known Chesnutt farm on the outskirts of Etowah. Grace made all the clothes for her family of seven children. One day her brother, Frank Payne, watched her at her sewing chores. She laid her cloth down and cut around the pattern with an ax. "When I get a job," said Frank, "I'm going to buy you a pair of scissors with my first pay check." Harold Delay of Etowah and his parents moved into a railroad boxcar which had been set just off the

tracks. According to Harold, the family's water supply was shipped by freight train. When the train went through, water was loaded into a holding tank. Such were the difficulties faced by many families during the 1930's.<sup>9</sup>

McMinn County was fortunate in that its main business, farming, provided a cushion for city dwellers, too. Avery Sanford of Etowah, a railroad employee, was laid off, but he never went hungry. He worked for a farmer who paid \$1 for a ten-hour work day, or the equivalent in produce, furnishing lunch for workers as well. According to Sanford, "Farmers supplied a lot of employment for those out of work."<sup>10</sup>

The towns of McMinn County suffered with varying degrees from the Depression. Niota, a one-industry town, had one of the most stable economies in the county. Crescent Hosiery Mill employed approximately 140 of the 400 members of the community. The mill was well-managed, had a strong financial base, and was able, therefore, to offer a quality product to customers in St. Louis and Chicago at a competitive price. As a result, Crescent expanded its operation during the Depression years, unemployment was almost non-existent, and the Bank of Niota, through conservative banking practices, remained strong. The town of Niota incurred no indebtedness and property owners enjoyed a tax rate of 25 cents per \$100 assessed value.<sup>11</sup>

Etowah, the L&N town, also was a one-industry town, but the Depression there turned into a panic. During most of the 1920's, the community grew and shared in the general prosperity of the era. It had a country club, YMCA, new Carnegie Library, a movie house, several churches, a weekly newspaper, a new four-year high school, an excellent system of well-paved streets and sidewalks, and many other features that were remarkable for a town of its size. In 1924, the L&N improved the town's economy by investing an additional \$250,000 in machine shops, thereby tripling its employment. By 1925, there were 2,100 men working in the shops and another 250 were employed on the crews that manned the 14 passenger and seven freight trains that went in and out of town daily. When the shops turned out at three in the afternoon, the town hummed with activity as hundreds of men flooded the streets, and many dropped into the various stores to purchase groceries and other needs on their way home from work. Most purchases were made on credit and the men would settle up or at least pay a little on their account on payday. So essentially each L&N payday was everyone's payday — the 15th and 30th of the month. Many of the 500 cotton mill workers from Pendergast, a Polk County town now known as Delano, shopped in Etowah.<sup>12</sup>

For Etowah, the Depression was just an episode in a series of devastating economic events. The first calamity was the consequence of progress: in 1928, L&N management announced that it would switch to steel gondolas instead of using wooden cars which were built and maintained in the Etowah shops. Shortly thereafter there was a layoff of

about 200 men, followed by a slower but continuous reduction in the number of employees in the woodmill, blacksmith shops, car repair shops and various other maintenance shops as the wooden cars were phased out. In 1930, the town began to feel the effects of the Depression; employment of train crews dwindled as the production and transportation of goods decreased. In 1931, Etowah was dealt a third economic blow; L&N moved its division headquarters to Knoxville. General business offices and clerks moved, too. Some employees were transferred to other railroad yards. Some transferees were able to sell their homes, usually at a loss, but other families were forced to abandon them. Less fortunate employees were laid off. In a period of about three years the force of 2,100 that had manned the shops shrank to a crew of 80, and the payroll of \$210,000 per month plummeted to \$14,000.<sup>13</sup>

Checking to see if anyone had been recalled became a part of the daily routine for most former L&N employees. Early each morning they gathered in groups standing in front of the bank, on street corners, or in the L&N grove, or sitting in one of the drugstores taking stock of their situation. For many families, the most apparent solution was to return to the family farm they had left for a seemingly secure and affluent future in Etowah. The Sam Saffles family, for example, returned to the Saffles farm in Sevierville, Tennessee. They intended to be away only a few months until things were a little better, but their stay stretched into years. Other families never returned. More than a hundred houses stood empty.<sup>14</sup>

Retail merchants were severely distressed. Not only were sales down, but they were unable to collect credit accounts. They had also lost the Pendergast cotton mill workers' trade when the mill closed around 1930. Some stores, like Ownbey Bros., were forced into bankruptcy because of their large unrecoverable accounts receivable. Some businesses closed due to lack of demand for their products, and one, Knox and Co., moved to Athens where the business climate was better. In May of 1930, the **Etowah Enterprise** encouraged citizens to spend their way out of the Depression. There had been a business turnaround, reported the newspaper, and the return of prosperity could be hastened by "the release of individual purchasing power." Individuals, suggested the newspaper, would be doing themselves and their community a favor by painting and repairing buildings or purchasing clothes and furniture now when prices were lower than they had been in years. A year later, in April 1931, a newspaper advertisement repeated this refrain: "Goodbye Depression, Prosperity is Headed Our Way — Let us meet it with open arms by putting money in circulation, paying our debts, buying things we need now." But the panacea of "spending our way out of the depression" ignored the economic ailment of Etowah, the availability of little cash.<sup>15</sup>

The **Etowah Enterprise** pressed merchants to advertise, claiming that merchants who did so got the business. Although the buying power of

Etowahans had been reduced due to layoffs at the L&N shops, sales volume was better than in previous years, continued the paper. The "wise advertising of our progressive merchants" and the low prices had attracted buyers from areas surrounding Etowah which had resulted in a tenfold increase in out-of-town customers.<sup>16</sup>

The September 11, 1931 edition announced that Etowah merchants were "waking up" to the fact that Etowah was in the heart of an agriculture area with a trade potential previously untapped. Etowah merchants could enjoy a volume of business many times that of the past, counseled the newspaper, by providing a cash market for farm products and carrying merchandise required by farmers at attractive prices. Subsequently, over a hundred farmers were guests at an Etowah Kiwanis Club banquet. The purpose of the farmer-businessman meeting was to promote a spirit of cooperation and to provide the farmer with a means to earn cash to spend in the Etowah retail market. At this meeting, a discussion indicated that farmers could earn \$250 an acre by growing strawberries. Another meeting was scheduled to investigate the possibility of forming a strawberry growers cooperative under the guidance of County Agent L.M. Amburgy.<sup>17</sup>

A campaign, entitled the Etowah Boosters Red Card Auction Campaign, aimed at boosting local sales and stimulating the collection of credit accounts as well as beefing up the business of its organizer, the Etowah Printing and Publishing Company (publishers of the **Etowah Enterprise**), was launched in June of 1931. There were three levels of people participating in this campaign. First were the Etowah merchants, who were known as Etowah Boosters and identified themselves by a sign which read "This store issues Etowah Boosters Red Auction Script and Votes." Second were candidates, or "ambitious women" who persuaded friends to sign cards pledging their trade to Etowah Boosters during the duration of the campaign. Each pledge card obtained by the candidate entitled her to 1,000 votes toward winning a grand prize of \$250 in gold. Third were "voters" who made purchases or paid accounts within five days of the L&N paydays at Etowah Booster Stores. A purchase entitled the buyer to auction script and 1,000 votes. The auction script was to be used at the once-monthly auctions held at the L&N grove at which merchandise ranging from groceries to furniture was up for bids. Cash was prohibited. Auction script could also be used at the store where the purchase was made for sealed bids on merchandise given away by that merchant each Saturday night. Vote coupons were given to the buyer's favorite candidate. Despite these efforts — advertising, attracting out-of-town trade, and providing customers with incentives for trading at home and for paying accounts — business remained unimproved and one business, banking, worsened.<sup>18</sup>

When the Depression began, there were two banks in Etowah, but due to the rise in unemployment and the decrease in business, the People's

Bank and the First National Bank of Etowah, merged on December 15, 1930. The People's Bank, which had been doing business on the corner of Ninth Street and Tennessee Avenue, moved to the First National's headquarters on Tennessee Avenue in the present location of Southern United Bank. The president of First National, J.S. Reed, continued as president with T.W. Cantrell of People's serving as executive vice-president.<sup>19</sup>

In the summer of 1931, Captain E.M. Shelley of Morristown, Tennessee came to Etowah as the First National Bank president. Many friends, said Shelley, had written to congratulate him on his appointment and his connection with Etowah. There was not a town in East Tennessee, he said, with as bright a future. Within a month of his appointment, the L&N Division Headquarters move was made. Much to Shelley's concern, many depositors panicked and withdrew their money.<sup>20</sup>

Nancy Cantrell Dender related the following story based on her recollections of conversations with her father, Frank M. Cantrell, who was a director of the First National Bank during this critical period as well as an officer of the Etowah Water and Light.

"There was no reason to close the bank; it was completely solvent. Daddy drove Shelley to Nashville to alleviate his fears. The Tennessee bank examiners confirmed Daddy's opinion — the bank was not in trouble. But Shelley was not convinced, so Daddy drove Captain Shelley and the bank records to Washington. The federal examiners agreed with Daddy and the Tennessee examiners — the bank was not in trouble. They returned to Etowah. Just as Captain Shelley got out of the car Daddy asked, 'Do you feel better about it now?' 'Yes,' he answered. The next morning Shelley closed the bank. Every morning when Daddy went to work, a certain gentleman standing in front of the Etowah Water and Light Company always greeted him: 'Frank, is my money safe?' Daddy sure hated to face him this day."<sup>21</sup>

"The gloomiest time of the Depression," said Leonard Truelove, "was when the bank closed." Now there was no formal place to cash payroll checks. The Etowah Water and Light Company began to cash checks as a courtesy to its customers. "Everyone knew that Daddy was carrying about ten thousand in cash between the Athens bank and the Water and Light Company; this was at a time when people would kill for five dollars," said Nancy Dender. So Mr. Cantrell, with the endorsement of the First National Bank of Athens, decided to apply for a bank charter. The Cantrell Banking Company opened for business in September 1932, operating initially as a "chinaman's bank"; that is, checks were cashed for a fee, deposits into savings accounts were accepted, but no loans were made. Although the new bank solved the check-cashing dilemma, it did not restore to the former level the spirit of hope and optimism that existed before the closing of the First National on June 15, 1932.<sup>22</sup>

Although Etowah had set its property tax rate at \$4 per \$100 — the

highest rate in the county — by the summer of 1929 the town could not meet its financial obligations; nevertheless, commissioners carried out city business with the characteristic optimism of the times. Earlier, when Etowah was booming, the town had issued bonds to fund the building and paving of an unusually fine system of streets and sidewalks. At this time there was no unemployment insurance to compensate those who were laid off due to curtailment of the L&N operation; consequently, an appalling number of property taxes were in arrears. Bonds issued in good times and due in hard times were not retired; instead, refunding bonds were repeatedly issued. Apparently this financial strain was regarded as a temporary condition for until 1932 there was no significant change in the money-spending policy of the town. For example, in a series of called meetings beginning June 7 and ending on July 3 in 1930, the following actions were authorized: a Tennessee Avenue bridge extension to be contracted; a "Road Machine to be purchased; Ordinance No. 158 which created Improvement District No. 27 was passed in three readings with no opposition; \$12,000 in bonds were issued to cover the cost of building streets in the newly created District No. 27; Refunding Bonds totalling \$15,000 were issued.<sup>23</sup>

In August 1930, commissioners made a concerted effort to refill the city coffers. C.C. Reynolds, the city recorder, was instructed to collect past due taxes by the end of September and to prepare a certified list of delinquent taxpayers on October 1. No further mention of this matter appears in the city minutes, but the action must have been ineffective because on December 24 the town borrowed \$1,000 to meet the school payroll for that month.<sup>24</sup>

Although no direct reference to the Depression can be found in the minutes surveyed (1929-1933), several actions were taken which were, most likely, associated with the Depression: In September 1931, loitering was prohibited with penalties of fines ranging from \$1 to \$50; in a called meeting in October 1931, rents on 20 pieces of property purchased by the city at a tax sale were established; and in April 1932, a set of rules governing fire prevention was written and the fire department was authorized to purchase equipment needed to bring the town under a lower fire classification. This last action may have been related to the belief of many McMinn County residents (as expressed in formal interviews and private conversations) that fires were becoming more numerous and arson was commonplace.<sup>25</sup>

By 1932, the former assurance that prosperity was just ahead had dissipated, and in its place was gloom and depression — emotional and financial. A letter written to Mrs. J.T. Burnett in response to her request for the installation of a Tennessee Avenue street light signifies the bleakness of the town's financial plight: "This matter was seriously considered by the board, but inasmuch as the revenues of the town were far in arrears, and the possibility that the street lights already installed



would have to be discontinued, they did not think it advisable to install another light just at this time," stated the recorder.<sup>26</sup>

At the first regular meeting of the newly-elected board on December 12, 1932, a crowd jammed the recorder's office, and the meeting had to be adjourned to the clubroom. The business which had spurred this strong interest was jobs. Fifty-nine anxious applicants vied for six positions, the only ones likely to be available for months. The commissioners felt pressured and, therefore, adjourned to "executive session" in the privacy of the recorder's office where selections for chief of police, night policeman and fire chief were made. The position of sanitary man was let out for bids. The new year must have seemed bleak to the unsuccessful candidates for these positions. Indeed, it must have seemed bleak to most Etowah residents. By March 1933, unemployment was widespread, the population had decreased, retail sales had slumped, life's savings had been wiped out, and the town itself was on the verge of bankruptcy.<sup>27</sup>

During the best of times, the level of prosperity in Englewood had been far below that enjoyed by Etowah. The two major employers were textile mills which operated a lot of the time on a part-time basis and with a decreased payroll. With both mills operating at capacity, the maximum combined employment was about 400, most of whom were women.<sup>28</sup>

Workers at the Eureka Cotton Mill began their day at 6:25 a.m. when the whistle sounded a signal for workers to start the spinning and knitting machines. The whistle continued to punctuate the day's activities, and although few could afford a watch, everyone in town knew by its midday sound that it was dinner time. When the final whistle sounded at 4:00 p.m., workers left behind them as many as 250 union suits they had made from raw cotton.

Orders for knitted underwear, however, fluctuated, but the mill suffered a more serious problem due to a lack of financial resources. For a time, the mill solved its cash flow problem by paying employees with "punch outs" redeemable only at one store. This arrangement was a source of dissatisfaction to other local merchants and mill workers, and it proved to be the store's undoing. When the mill closed, the business was left with worthless "punch outs," and as a result the store went broke.<sup>29</sup>

The Englewood Manufacturing Company, a hosiery mill, was generally regarded at the time as an efficient operation, but it, too, failed for several reasons as related by W.P. Chesnutt, Sr., whose family owned 20 percent of the stock: products were delivered to many customers who could not pay; the mill had contracted for raw materials at prices much higher than the current depression prices and had to honor the contracts; and finally there was a drastic reduction in orders by customers. Despite desperate attempts by Mr. Chesnutt and his father to borrow all they could in order to save the mill, their efforts failed.<sup>30</sup>

Late in February 1933, conditions in Englewood worsened — the Bank of Englewood closed its doors permanently. Col. W.W. Eledge's father,

W.W. Eledge, Sr., was the bank manager at this time, and the son noted that several of the bank's stockholders withdrew their money. "People were scared," he recalled, and "although my father knew a run was likely, he did not remove his money nor did he advise me to remove mine." The problem with a "run" was cash. If a bank could muster enough to cover the "run" it survived; otherwise, it collapsed. One way a bank could get cash was by using its outstanding loans as collateral for a loan, something the Englewood Bank attempted to do. "The run was on our local bank," said W.P. Chesnutt, Sr. "The bank had plenty of good 'paper' (collateral) but was running out of cash. My father had a good fast automobile so I drove all night with two bank directors to Nashville with the 'paper'. We got the cash and got back to the bank in time, but we did not take enough 'paper' and we did not get enough cash."<sup>31</sup>

Depositors who, like Col. Eledge, had not contributed to the "run" and depositors who had been unsuccessful in their "run" to regain deposits did not lose everything, however. When the bank's assets were sold, they were able to repay their customers 82 percent of their savings although assets had been sold for only a tenth of their value. But the whole town suffered, for the Bank of Englewood failure, which occurred just a few days before Franklin Roosevelt took office, triggered a reflexive action; both mills closed and retail businesses tumbled. Unemployment touched almost every family.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the crises in Englewood and Etowah, McMinn's largest town, Athens, fared better mainly because of its diversified industrial base. Athens had a woolen mill, two hosiery mills, a stove foundry, a plow company, a dairy processing plant, a table factory, and a large flour mill. All but the woolen mill were home-owned industries, and nearly all manufactured products were sold outside of the county; thus new money was continuously brought into the community.<sup>33</sup>

A January 1932 edition of the **Etowah Enterprise** reported on business conditions in Athens. Orders for Athens Hosiery Mill products were so large that the plant was operating full-time with an extra shift. About 425 people were employed, and this level of activity was expected to last for several months. There was a similar demand for the silk hose made by Chilhowee Mills; this industry also had months of advance orders. The Athens Stove Works was alternating between full- and part-time operation, but F.O. Mahery, secretary-treasurer, was optimistic about future orders as the plant had not closed since its establishment. Athens Table and Manufacturing Company expected to be in full production by mid-January, and the Athens Woolen Mill, which the newspaper termed "one of the old standbys during days of depression," was enjoying good business. The newspaper claimed the combined payroll was, at this time, about two-thirds the payroll at full capacity. Newspaper reports on the level of industrial activity in Athens throughout these early Depression years indicate that this was the "normal" level for the period.<sup>34</sup>

Some new industries were planned. A February 1932 *Enterprise* stated that a new hosiery mill was to be built. In June of the same year, the newly formed Appalachia Packing Company (H.A. Vestal, president; W.R. Cooke, vice-president; G.W. Goforth, secretary-treasurer) purchased a 5-acre tract of land on Lee Highway and erected twelve 60-foot-long rabbit-breeding houses. The plan was to place breeders under contract to supply rabbits. After slaughtering them, the company would ship both meat and fur to Eastern markets. Apparently the rabbit business was unsuccessful for it does not appear in the 1934 T.V.A. industrial listing.<sup>35</sup>

Profits from retail trade were leaner than in previous years — consumers had learned to spend more wisely, to make purchases count — but meager earnings did not discourage newcomers. In 1930, Fred Wankan, Sr., a native of Laurel, Mississippi, purchased the *Post-Athenian*, a semi-weekly newspaper; new equipment was added and on March 16, 1931, the paper became a daily and the name was changed to *The Daily Post-Athenian*. In 1931, the *Etowah Enterprise* reported a number of new business openings: many grocery, hardware, dry goods, and specialty shops, such as radio and electrical supply stores. Some established businesses expanded their activities. J. Nat Moore added a complete line of International Harvester Company products and in February 1932, *The Daily Post-Athenian* made some changes. The newspaper began to publish a weekly for farmers who could not afford the daily edition, and the newspaper offered to swap subscriptions for anything but “skunk hides and ax handles.”<sup>36</sup>

All three Athens banks, The First National Bank of Athens, Citizens National Bank, and Farmers Bank, remained solvent. An interview with Paul Walker explains why: banking practices were conservative, investments were diversified, and the business climate was generally healthy. When county banks began to fail, recalls Rufus Houser, who had gone to work as a First National Bank clerk in 1929, there was one man who walked back and forth along the street in front of the bank all day long checking to see how many were withdrawing their savings. He intended to withdraw his money the moment failure seemed imminent. He never did remove his money, but some did. If a customer who appeared anxious came in to make a withdrawal, said Houser, someone, often Mr. Jim Fisher the bank president, would talk to him. He was reminded that the safest place for otherwise uninvested money was in the bank where it was safe from fire and theft. Fisher was apparently quite a psychologist who knew just what to say and do to inspire confidence and destroy panic. He instructed bank personnel to keep plenty of money in sight so customers would feel more money was coming in than they could put away.<sup>37</sup>

One depositor who did remove her money from the safe-keeping of her bank later regretted it. Mrs. L.C. Evans, director of a funeral home, who

withdrew \$2,300 because of the recent failure of the Etowah Bank, hid her money, but her maid found the hiding place and both maid and money disappeared.<sup>38</sup>

Houser also recalled bank policy on home-mortgage foreclosure. There was no market for houses; therefore, the bank felt it was better to allow people to pay only the interest or, in some cases, half the interest. First National customers were actually better off in their dealings with the bank than employees. Due to the lowered profits, the bank found it necessary to reduce salaries.<sup>39</sup>

Not only did Athens' people express confidence in their banks, they also invested in the economic future of their town by building homes. In the first two months of 1932, 45 building permits were issued; in the first two months of 1933, 18 were issued. Many new homes were brick and most were in the \$5,000 range. Independent observers evidently felt Athenians' confidence was well-founded. Traveling salesmen reported that conditions in Athens were far better than those in other East Tennessee towns.<sup>40</sup>

The two other McMinn towns that had banking institutions were farming communities with trading centers. Both Riceville and Calhoun were without industry and people living there worked on farms or in factories in nearby towns. The Calhoun Bank, which closed in 1931, was the first bank failure in the county, but the Riceville Bank endured.

Local government in McMinn County was totally unprepared to deal with the economic crisis of the magnitude of the Great Depression. Although state funds were received for educational purposes, the chief source of revenue for the county was from property taxes. As the Depression deepened, property values declined with a corresponding decline in related taxes. The inability of many property owners to pay their taxes served to further compound the financial plight of local government. Thus, financially strapped, McMinn's government was unable to provide much in the way of relief during the 1930's. Instead, local government was forced to retrench in providing even basic services.

With virtually no assistance from local government, relief efforts during the early years of the Depression had to be met in other ways. Initially, there was no coordinated relief effort in McMinn County. Organizations such as the Red Cross, churches, civic groups, PTAs, and Welfare League provided relief on a community rather than a county-wide basis. In Etowah, for example, the local ministerial association conducted a fund-raising campaign for the needy in June 1931. The campaign began with a huge parade led by the Etowah band. The Hi-Y boys and Boy Scouts assisted in receiving subscriptions and donations. Working men were asked to give a day's salary and business and professional men were asked for ten percent of a day's profits. Each sewing club donated one day to making clothes for the needy. Com-

munities in other parts of the county also undertook projects of various types to assist the destitute.<sup>41</sup>

While the needy were cared for in an informal way by various groups and individuals, there was a real need for an over-all coordinated effort to make relief more efficient. This was brought about in October 1931 with the selection of Fred Wankan, Sr., owner and publisher of **The Daily Post-Athenian**, as head of the local Red Cross organization. Wankan replaced Robert C. Hornsby, Jr. who resigned to take special postal training in Washington. At that time the Red Cross announced that thereafter all relief would be channeled through that organization. Wankan appointed an advisory committee in each community to receive and review requests for assistance.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to processing applications for relief, the advisory committees were responsible for receiving and dispensing Red Cross flour to



Fred E. Wankan, Sr., editor and publisher of the **Post-Athenian**, a semi-weekly newspaper, made the publication into a daily in 1931. Wankan was head of relief efforts for McMinn County from 1931-34, serving as Red Cross, RFC and CWA Administrator.

Courtesy of Fred E. Wankan, Sr.

the needy. Flour distribution centers were established in Athens, Englewood, Etowah, Calhoun, Riceville and Niota.

Applications for flour had to be accompanied by recommendations from three well-known persons from the community in which the applicant lived stating that the person was worthy and destitute. False statements forfeited the right to receive flour and the names were turned over to authorities. Applicants had to furnish the number in the family and the reason that made it necessary to receive flour. The flour could not be sold and the sacks were marked with the lettering RED CROSS.<sup>43</sup>

Other items were also distributed. In February of 1933, *The Daily Post-Athenian* reported that farmers had donated corn and that each person receiving flour would also get a peck of meal. Coal, mined in the state penitentiary at Petros, was available to towns for the price of the railroad freight. This was distributed in quarter-ton lots. On August 30, 1932 *The Daily Post-Athenian* reported the county had placed a large order for cloth which had recently been made available by Congress.<sup>44</sup>

Despite this assistance, however, conditions continued to deteriorate and by the spring of 1932 over 1,000 people were being assisted by the Red Cross. Efforts were made to help the county become self-sufficient through the establishment of gardens. Under the leadership of Wankan, the Athens Chamber of Commerce and the Athens Kiwanis Club organized a county-wide campaign to establish gardens for every family without employment. County Agent Amburgy and Home Demonstration Agent Myrtle Webb supervised and directed preparation of the gardens.<sup>45</sup>

An appeal went out for use of vacant lots in which to grow gardens. W.C. Carter of the local telephone office was placed in charge of taking names of those willing to donate a plot of land and the Red Cross office received requests from those in need of garden space. To further encourage growing of gardens, the Red Cross announced that no relief would be dispensed to anyone without one. The garden campaign was a huge success as requests for garden plots exceeded availability. A public appeal was also made for donation of garden tools and seed — beans, peas, cabbage, tomatoes, turnips, corn and potatoes. Over 3,600 pounds of seed were received.<sup>46</sup>

Not only were the needy assisted by the Red Cross and other organizations, but individuals also contributed to alleviating the suffering. "The heart of McMinn County is being touched as never before," said *The Daily Post-Athenian*. "There are deeds of kindness and more generosity shown at this time than has been recorded for years if ever before and the public does not know it. There is giving to this one and that one who is needy, and charitable organizations are not aware of it. Clothing and food are being transferred from the plentiful field to empty larders," said the newspaper. As a result of the cooperation and generosity of many individuals, McMinn Countians were able to survive the Depression better than many other areas of the country.<sup>47</sup>

While the destitute were seeking relief, McMinn County taxpayers also sought relief from the burden of property taxes. Local taxpayers joined in a state-wide effort, which resulted in the formation of the Tennessee Taxpayers Association, in demanding a reduction in the cost of local government with a corresponding lowering of taxes. The movement began locally in May 1932 when A.W. Prather wrote a letter to the editor of *The Daily Post-Athenian* suggesting a meeting of taxpayers and calling for a reduction of county government by one-third. Others joined in the call for action and suggested various economic moves which the county could take. Among other things, it was suggested that salaries of county officials be reduced by one-third. A mass meeting was held at the courthouse on June 25, attended by more than 1,500 irate taxpayers. A list of 15 demands was drawn up for presentation to the county court. When the court met in July, it rejected taxpayer demands, but it did reduce the tax rate by 12 cents, setting it at \$2.06.<sup>48</sup>

While the taxpayers were unsuccessful in getting all of their demands through the county court, they were successful in forcing candidates up for election in August to campaign for a reduction in salaries if elected. Sheriff Boling Shoemaker asked for a 25 percent cut in his \$3,000 salary. Malcomb Cobb, deputy register, requested a 20 percent reduction of his \$900 a year salary. J.C. Cate, Democratic nominee for trustee, and Jess R. Ware, incumbent and independent candidate for tax assessor, announced they would agree to cut their salaries if elected. One candidate, W.R. Kelly, refused to go along with voluntary salary cuts stating that only the state legislature could legally reduce salaries.<sup>49</sup>

Politics continued to dominate the local scene in the fall of 1932 as Democrats embraced Franklin D. Roosevelt of New York for president and the Republicans aligned themselves behind incumbent President Herbert Hoover. Roosevelt for President Clubs sprang up throughout the county with Etowah claiming the first such club in the state. The political highlight of the year occurred in October when Roosevelt, in a swing through the South, stopped briefly at the Etowah L&N Depot and spoke from the back of his train to a crowd of between 1,500 and 7,000, depending on which party count one relied on.<sup>50</sup>

In the presidential election, McMinn County maintained its historic place in the Republican column with Hoover garnering 51 percent of the 5,416 votes cast. Roosevelt did much better in Etowah where he received 56 percent of the 1,218 votes. No doubt Roosevelt's October visit was a factor in his victory there, but perhaps more important was his promise to put people to work in a town that had an extremely high unemployment rate.<sup>51</sup>

The period between Roosevelt's election in November 1932 and his inauguration in March 1933 was especially difficult for McMinn Countians. Unemployment rose drastically as several industrial plants were forced to lay off a large number of workers. In Etowah, the L&N Railroad

laid off 800. Facing an economic crisis, McMinn County appealed to the state for help. The State Council of Relief recommended to Governor Hill McAlister that, in view of the severity of conditions in the county, \$8,000 be requested from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation to be used for highway construction in McMinn. A report accompanying this recommendation indicated that the county needed \$14,000 to provide relief for 1,200 eligible families and 200 non-family individuals for the first two months of 1933. Included in this figure was the requested \$8,000 for work relief. The report stated that \$10,214.48 had been spent during the preceding 12 months to provide relief for 700 families and 5 to 10 non-family individuals. The request for funds was granted and 500 men were put to work on Mecca and Riceville pikes.<sup>52</sup>

The crisis continued to deepen, this time striking the banking industry. More and more depositors, like those in Englewood, lost confidence in banks and withdrew their money. Many who trusted banks distrusted the incoming president, but the result was the same — these people, too, hoarded their money. The danger was that sound institutions, like the Englewood Bank, would go under. Governor McAlister sought to deal with the banking situation by closing all state banks on March 1 for a period of six days. The banking holiday affected three county banks, Niota, Riceville, and the Farmers Bank in Athens. The Riceville Bank did not close as ordered, however. According to F.T. Harrison, cashier, the bank was in good condition and there was no reason to close its doors. The Niota and Farmers Bank both were reported in excellent condition and were operating again within two days. Reports from throughout the county indicated that a “solid wall of confidence” had held the line. There had been no scares and no “run” on the banks.<sup>53</sup>

On the eve of the inauguration of FDR, McMinn Countians reflected upon their situation over the past three years and wondered about the future. While the county had made it through the early years of the Depression in better condition than many other areas of the country, it too had suffered, particularly the towns of Englewood and Etowah. Since 1929, local residents had experienced a depressed agricultural economy, three bank failures, a curtailment of business and industry, high unemployment, bankruptcies, and an increasing demand for relief. They had been forced to rely upon one another, with some exceptions, for help in combating the Depression. Now they waited to see how the new president would deal with the economic crisis.



**TABLE I**  
**Major McMinn County Industries, 1934\***

NAME	PRINCIPAL PRODUCT	NO. EMPLOYED MEN WOMEN		ANNUAL PAYROLL	ANNUAL SALES
Athens Woolen Mills	Shoddy	120	80	\$120,000	\$200,000
Athens Plow Co.	Plows	12	0	15,000	25,000
Athens Stove Co.	Coal, Wood Gas Stoves	300	4	200,000	500,000
Athens Hosiery Mills	Hose	105	245	150,000	440,000
Chilhowee Hosiery Mills	Silk Hose	55	85	85,000	212,500
Athens Table Mfg. Co.	Tables	137	3	50,000	225,000
Athens Roller Mills	Flour, Meal	10	1	10,000	92,000
Crescent Hosiery Mills	Hose	42	98	75,000	250,000
Englewood Mfg. Co.	Anklets	60	65	48,000	175,000
Eureka Cotton Mills	Underwear	60	140	70,000	350,000
L&N Railroad	Repairs	230		450,000	
Wood Baryte Co.	Baryte	27		14,000	52,000
Wood Baryte Co.	Baryte	15		7,800	15,500
Howell Nurseries	Plants	15		3,898	8,785

\*T.V.A. Industrial Report, 1934.

**Table II**  
**Populations In McMinn County\***

	1920	1930	1940
Athens	2,580	5,385	6,930
Etowah	2,516	4,209	3,362
Englewood	1,271	1,471	1,342
Niota	467	443	623
Riceville	None given	530	500
Calhoun	None given	236	None given
County	25,133	29,019	30,781

\* U.S. Bureau of Census, Fourteenth Census, State Compendium, Tennessee (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1925).

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5. Elisha Brient, interview, 9 April 1983; **Daily Post-Athenian**, 13 January 1933.
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30. W.P. Chesnutt, Sr., letter to Bill Akins, 28 April 1983.
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36. **Ibid.**, 16 March 1931.
37. Paul J. Walker, interview, 10 May 1983; Rufus Houser, interview, 23 July 1983.

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39. Houser interview; David L. Armstrong, **A History of First National Bank, 1872-1972** (1972), 10.
40. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 12 December 1931, 4 March 1932.
41. **Etowah Enterprise**, 10 June 1931.
42. **Ibid.**, 13, 30 October 1931.
43. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 12 April 1932.
44. **Ibid.**, 30 August 1932, 31 January, 8 February 1933.
45. **Ibid.**, 22 April 1932.
46. **Ibid.**, 1 March, 22, 23 April 1932.
47. **Ibid.**, 20 July, 12 August 1932.
48. **Ibid.**, 15, 17 June, 5 July 1932; **Minutes McMinn County Quarterly Court**, 4 July 1932.
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50. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 24 October 1932.
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## **Chapter 2**

# **The National Government to the Rescue 1933-1940**

**By R. Frank McKinney**

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McMinn Countians anxiously awaited the inauguration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt as 32nd President of the United States on March 4, 1933. In a county that had been a Republican stronghold for almost 75 years, there was much skepticism as to what the "New Deal" administration would offer a politically rebel county. Answers were fast in coming and apprehension soon dissipated as the president moved quickly to deal with the economic crisis.

The day following his inauguration Roosevelt declared a national emergency and ordered a bank holiday. At the time he took office the nation's banking industry was critical. Between 1930 and 1932, 773 national banks and 3,604 state banks had failed. In Tennessee there were almost 100 bank failures, three of which were in McMinn County.<sup>1</sup>

All banks closed in McMinn County on March 6 in accordance with FDR's proclamation.\* However, after one day, the state banks at Niota and Riceville operated on a restricted schedule, making change, cashing government checks, opening safety deposit boxes, and accepting payment on obligations. The Bank of Englewood, which closed its doors on February 27, reopened on March 7 under the direction of a liquidating agent for the state banking department. On March 15, all banks in the county, with the exception of the Englewood Bank, were certified as "sound" by the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury and were allowed to open

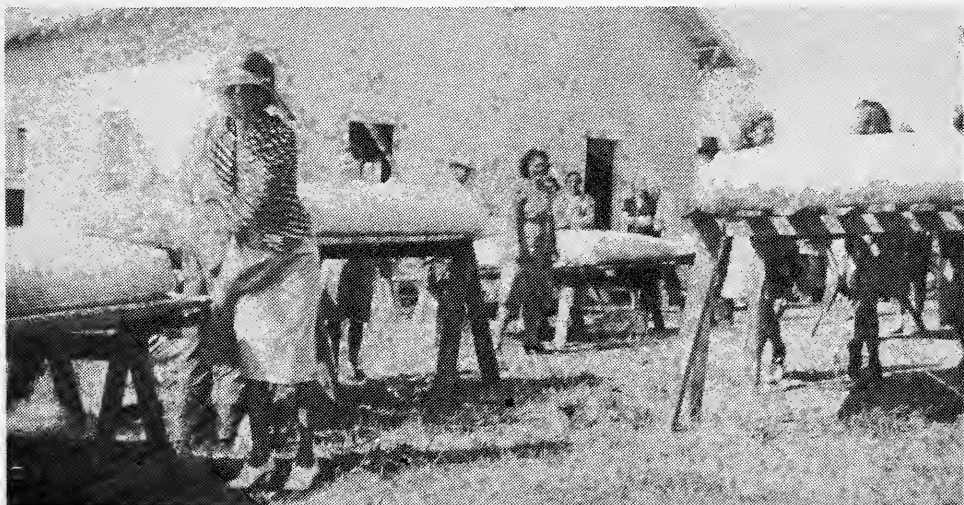
\*This was the second closing in March, 1933: the first having been ordered by Tennessee's Governor Hill McAlister on March 1.

for normal business. A survey indicated that confidence in the banks was strong as deposits exceeded withdrawals.<sup>2</sup>

The banking industry was given much credit for staving off a general feeling of panic among the people. McMinn County banks went the "second mile" to spread a spirit of good relationship by helping those they could, thus creating a greater feeling of confidence. This degree of confidence was further strengthened in January 1934 when the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation was formed to guarantee that no depositor in any failed bank would lose his money. President Roosevelt first announced that 97 percent of the nation's bank depositors would be insured immediately up to \$2,500 against loss, and after July 1, 1934 the insurance would be increased to \$10,000 for each account.

All national banks and members of the Federal Reserve System were automatically insured under the new federal law. Gradually all banks became members of the FDIC. Once the people realized this, business and industry in the country took on new life. Confidence permeated the air, and it was especially felt in McMinn County by the upsurge in retail buying and the opening of new businesses.

Employment also picked up as the Reconstruction Finance Corporation made more funds available to the county. By mid-March, over 1,000 men were at work improving county roads, with a weekly payroll of \$2,000. Reports from over the state indicated that employment and business in general were on the upgrade.<sup>3</sup>



Miss Myrtle Webb, home demonstration agent, supervising a mattress making project.

Courtesy of Jessica Schultz

At the same time the federal government was putting the unemployed back to work, it also tightened relief qualifications. According to new

RFC rules, those receiving relief must make every effort to provide for themselves, rather than depending on local, state or federal government assistance. All families receiving aid had to plant a "subsistence garden" if ground was available. Gus. G. Myer of the Red Cross came from the Washington headquarters to Athens to "check on the situation" and gave a high commendation for the manner in which his agency's relief was being handled in McMinn County.<sup>4</sup>

By early June, McMinn County began to benefit from federal monies. It received its first allotment of the new \$50,000,000 relief fund headed by Harry Hopkins in FDR's cabinet, and *The Daily Post-Athenian* optimistically reported, "We are already beginning to emerge from the Depression. We are now in the dawn of a new day. Prices are advancing on the farm and in the factory."<sup>5</sup>

In July, Fred Wankan, Sr., editor and publisher of *The Daily Post-Athenian*, was appointed to head up direct relief work in McMinn County for both RFC and American Red Cross. The RFC would provide jobs and the Red Cross would continue distribution of flour and clothing. Wankan, upon assuming his new responsibilities, warned that relief funds were exhausted and that those with farms or crops were ineligible to receive aid of any type. Frank Peek was chosen county chairman of the County Re-Employment Committee which was composed of representatives from business, labor and various organizations. Three thousand signed up for employment.<sup>6</sup>

But a jolt came in the face of preparations when federal authorities informed county officials that if the state, counties, and municipalities failed to match federal relief funds by October, all work would cease. Under the proposal, McMinn County was eligible to receive \$100,000 from the federal government for public work for benefit of the unemployed, \$70,000 of which was in the form of a loan to be repaid at four percent interest; \$30,000 was an out-right grant and thus did not have to be repaid.<sup>7</sup>

When the county court met on August 18 to consider the loan, it rejected it, stating that the interest on the loan would be too much expense for the county. The court apparently felt that the county already owed more than it could raise in taxes and refused to further imperil county finances.<sup>8</sup>

Rejection of the loan left many of the unemployed disappointed and the relief program in a critical situation. During the summer and fall of 1933 the Red Cross was swamped by requests for relief. With funds exhausted and flour down to just a few sacks, the organization appealed to local citizens for help.<sup>9</sup>

By the middle of 1933, however, New Deal promises began to take shape. President Roosevelt and Congress had mapped out a plan of strategy that they hoped would turn around the then dire economic condition existing in the country. Over the next several months a series of congressional bills were approved and governmental agencies

established to carry out FDR's promises. Those agencies having the greatest impact upon the people of McMinn County included:

NRA - National Recovery Administration  
CWA - Civil Works Administration  
TERA -Tennessee Emergency Relief Administration  
WPA - Works Progress Administration  
PWA - Public Works Administration  
AAA - Agricultural Adjustment Administration  
CCC - Civilian Conservation Corps  
NYA - National Youth Administration  
TVA - Tennessee Valley Authority  
REA - Rural Electrification Administration  
FHA - Federal Home Administration

The National Recovery Administration, established in June 1933, was designed to forge a partnership between government and industry. Its purpose was to promote re-employment, shorter working hours, higher wages, and better labor relations, and to eliminate unfair competition. Trade and industrial associations were permitted to draft codes which became effective when approved by the President. Violators of these codes could be punished by a fine. A Blue Eagle, with the slogan NRA — WE DO OUR PART, was adopted to be displayed in a prominent place by those participating in the program.



NRA logo displayed by cooperating retail establishments and industries.

*Etowah Enterprise*

Through cooperation of *The Daily Post-Athenian* and the *Etowah Enterprise*, a campaign was launched to acquaint every industry, business, and individual in the county with the conditions of the NRA Codes. Paul Walker, a local insurance executive, was named chairman of the Athens NRA committee, and Sam W. McKinney, Etowah merchant, was named as chairman for Etowah. They were to work with the chairmen of the other communities of McMinn County.

The campaign was to enlist every individual, every employer of labor, every employee, and every consumer in the battle which was "equivalent to war," according to *The Daily Post-*

**Athenian.** "There must be a Blue Eagle in every place of business and in every home in McMinn County," declared the paper.<sup>10</sup>

For the Blue Eagle campaign in Athens, **The Daily Post-Athenian** printed a coupon with a consumer's statement of cooperation with the U.S. Government to restore prosperity. Individuals signing would get a Blue Eagle emblem to display at home. In turn, they pledged to buy from Blue Eagle stores and businesses only. Thus pressure was placed on business to sign the NRA Codes.<sup>11</sup>

The women of McMinn County were asked to aid in the campaign by working through their various clubs in support of the NRA. Mrs. P.S. Taylor of Etowah was named district chairman, and Miss Louise Keith of Athens was appointed chairman for McMinn County.

By September 1933, Etowah had formed an NRA Compliance Committee to see that the provisions of NRA were carried out. This committee represented organized labor, retail employers, and consumers. Confidential reports of any overcharging or hours violations by industry or business were to be sent to Nashville. In two days, Etowah neared 100 percent in recruiting businesses and industry in the support of NRA. Store hours were shortened and wages began to be upgraded. The same response was reported from Athens, Calhoun, Riceville, Niota, and Englewood.<sup>12</sup>

Compliance with NRA rules in industry brought on some confusion and unrest. In one Athens plant 75 members of the union went on strike in August 1933 after one day of operating under NRA. Their chief complaints were that the company was not adhering to the Codes, a charge the company promptly denied, and that the wage increase with an eight-hour workday was not as much as they were making under the ten-hour shift. The walkout lasted one week with only half of the strikers taken back when the plant resumed operations. **The Daily Post-Athenian** printed a scorching editorial stating, "This is no time to strike, walk out nor shut down."<sup>13</sup>

Although a nationwide textile strike had been called by the unions for September 1, **The Daily Post-Athenian** later reported that harmony reigned in textile mills in McMinn County. There were some 600 employed in the county textile industry, with 350 in Athens, 250 in Niota, and 100 in Englewood. Due to the NRA, relations between employers and employees were reported to be harmonious and no work stoppage occurred when the strike went into effect nationwide. Throughout the 1930's, the labor situation in McMinn County remained relatively quiet. Manufacturing plants in Athens, now operating under the NRA Codes, were generally in agreement that the New Deal program of wage and hour regulations would benefit both employees and employers.<sup>14</sup>

Despite all of its initial efforts, the NRA ran into deep trouble in 1935, when the Supreme Court declared the NRA Act unconstitutional. But the economy had improved nationwide, 80 percent of the NRA codes were in



the process of being shelved during the early part of 1935 anyway, and the marriage of government and industry, plus the involvement of business, was being proved satisfactory.

While the NRA attempted to stimulate stagnant business in McMinn County, other efforts were being made to put people back to work. Direct federal relief in the county began in November, 1933 when Fred E. Wankan, Sr., who had been earlier appointed to take over the relief work of the RFC and Red Cross, was appointed to head the Civil Works Administration projects. Eight hundred jobless were promised work at wage rates of 30 cents per hour and up to \$1.10 per hour for highly skilled labor. Municipalities were required to furnish material, and labor was paid for by the CWA.<sup>15</sup>

In late November, the local CWA Advisory Committee, set up by Wankan to assist in administering local relief work, hastily drew up a list of 47 projects for state CWA approval. Twelve new projects and 35 school projects were approved. Athens received four, Calhoun one, Englewood two, Etowah three, and Niota two. Work included ditching, rocking, asphaltting of roads, cleaning and draining ditches, and renovation of school buildings. State approval was granted for 755 jobs, or about one-half of those on relief rolls.<sup>16</sup>

The local relief administrator stressed that the full quota of jobs would have to come from relief rolls and that politics would not be tolerated. "We do not care whether a man is a Republican or Democrat. The question is based on matter of need," Wankan said. By December 11, the full quota of 755 men was at work in the county. Meanwhile, because the state's allotment of relief funds had been cut by the federal government, wages for foremen had to be reduced to 40 cents an hour and those of skilled workers to 60 cents.<sup>17</sup>

A staggered work week was implemented in order to give jobs to more of the unemployed. Two crews of 755 each were established with each crew working every other week, resulting in 1,510 unemployed persons working two weeks a month.<sup>18</sup>

Attention now was being focused on the needy, since Christmas was approaching. With 100 Athens families in desperate straits, Mrs. W.E. Foree headed a group to place boxes in various stores for food, clothing, and toys. Similar arrangements took place in other communities in the county. The Poor Farm was made more comfortable for its 18 inmates by \$2,500 in CWA improvements.<sup>19</sup>

Not only were the needy made happy by CWA projects, but the merchants also. By December 20, the CWA weekly payroll had reached \$9,300, and merchants throughout the county shared in this bonanza in the sale of goods and in payments on past due accounts. By the time work projects were completed, it was estimated that approximately \$130,000 would be spent locally for labor and materials. In the meantime, CWA approved over \$35,000 for building an airport at Athens, and 128 men were

to be employed there.<sup>20</sup>

But bad news came in early January when the CWA announced that funds were running out and work projects would end in mid-February. Local officials were ordered to reduce maximum work hours and to stop further purchases of materials without state CWA approval. In addition, no more names were to be added to CWA relief rolls. Two weeks later, the staggered work system was ordered discontinued, forcing the elimination of 755 jobs.<sup>21</sup>

As February 15 approached, the date on which CWA projects were to terminate, there was much confusion locally over the status of work projects. Some had been completed; others were partially finished; still others, which had been approved, had not been initiated. Messages back and forth from state to local officials did not clarify matters and even led to further confusion and bewilderment.

On February 15, all CWA projects ceased in McMinn County pending approval of additional funds and projects from Nashville. Approval came the following day, but the work force was reduced by three-fourths of the original 755 quota, and work projects were severely limited. One of the projects to continue was the paving of Athens city streets at a cost of \$35,000 with \$5,000 for materials.<sup>22</sup>

But on March 5 **The Daily Post-Athenian** headlined "SWEEPING CHANGE IN FEDERAL RELIEF WORK MADE." Local officials were informed that CWA was to be phased out as of March 31, and workers were advised to seek employment elsewhere. The stoppage of work embittered many people. **The Daily Post-Athenian** said the entrenchment imperiled programs such as the Athens street project.<sup>23</sup>

At that point Administrator Wankan was charged with being derelict in his duty by members of the Athens Board of Aldermen. The city fathers accused Wankan of failure to promote with sufficient vigor the city's application for a \$5,000 project, the city having already rocked and rolled city streets in preparation for surfacing. Four of the aldermen paid a visit to Wankan's newspaper office where one of them told the administrator that he had been informed by an official at CWA state headquarters in Nashville that the failure to approve the tar expense was due to defects or delays in the application submitted by Wankan. Wankan replied that he had complied with every instruction from state headquarters and that the application had been filed promptly and properly. The argument grew more heated, culminating with the alderman striking the administrator with several blows. Ironically, the next day, the state office assured Wankan that CWA projects in McMinn County, including Athens city streets, would be completed but the CWA was replaced by the Tennessee Emergency Relief Administration on April 1. The county had a re-registration of the unemployed in a project to put 3,000 people back to work.<sup>24</sup>

In May, Wankan who had undergone recent surgery for throat cancer,

announced his resignation as head of relief for McMinn County. In his report to H.L. Moses, who succeeded him as TERA Director, Wankan stated that during his tenure 78 CWA projects were prepared and most had been completed. The majority of county schools had been greatly improved with CWA labor.<sup>25</sup>

Administering direct relief was no easy task and in filling jobs from relief rolls Wankan suffered both verbal abuse and bodily attacks. He sustained a broken jaw on one occasion when a drunken unemployed man assaulted him. "Everybody demanded jobs," Wankan recalled, and he received the brunt of the blame by those who did not receive them. The Democrats wrote Roosevelt that jobs went only to Republicans, and the Republicans wrote that only Democrats were being favored. The American Legion complained that veterans were not getting their share of jobs.<sup>26</sup>

Authorities in Washington sent the complaint letters to Wankan and requested a reply to the charges. The relief director promptly appointed Bruce Blevins, a former deputy game warden, to investigate the allegations and directed him to make a written, unbiased report. Blevins' investigation centered primarily on the rural sections of the county where most of the complaints originated. Upon completion of his inquiry, Blevins made his report to Wankan, who in turn notified Washington that none of the complaints were justified. At the same time, however, he issued a public statement reiterating that only those on relief rolls were eligible for CWA jobs, that anyone having information of ineligible workers should come forth, and that if the information proved correct, these individuals would be terminated.<sup>27</sup>

It is understandable why complaints arose. In an effort to put the unemployed to work as quickly as possible, programs were hastily conceived and placed into operation. It was virtually impossible to check every individual as to whether he qualified for assistance, and in the rush and confusion no doubt some charges were true that some workers got jobs who did not qualify.

There was confusion also over who qualified for relief work and there was a tendency to blame local relief officials for guidelines laid down in Washington. At this juncture, only the destitute, those without property or any means of support, were eligible for relief work. Thus, unemployed rural residents living on farms did not meet the work relief guidelines and became embittered when other unemployed workers were provided government jobs.

Wankan's tenure as head of relief for McMinn County from 1932 to 1934 was difficult, oftentimes controversial, and involved personal sacrifices. Trying to keep his own newspaper afloat during these hard times was taxing in itself, and at times it suffered as a result of his attention being focused on relief matters. Dealing with sometimes hostile individuals who blamed him for not "getting their share" and wrestling often with

confusing and contradictory directives from Washington and the state was perplexing. But through it all Fred Wankan was a pillar of strength and McMinn County benefited as a result.

The projects planned by the Tennessee Emergency Relief Administration were similar to those conducted by the Civil Works Administration. One of the first projects under TERA in McMinn County was the establishment of community gardens where vegetables were planted, canned, and turned over to the needy for consumption during the winter months. Community gardens were located in Athens, Englewood, and Etowah.

Under TERA regulations, individuals on work relief rolls were required to plant a garden in order to qualify for relief work or any assistance. Seeds and fertilizer were furnished by the government, and Professors G.L. Harris, agriculture teacher at McMinn High School, and J.H. McMcCallie, of Englewood, were employed to give instructions. As a result of these measures, gardening increased with between 400 to 500 plots cultivated by families on relief rolls.<sup>28</sup>

By July 1934, canning centers had been opened in Athens, Englewood, Etowah, and Calhoun under TERA supervision. Mrs. P.S. Taylor of Etowah was placed in charge. Farmers and gardeners alike brought their produce to be canned, paying one can out of four for the service. This project continued throughout the fall months and by the end of the canning season, over 12,000 cans of food had been preserved by TERA canneries.<sup>29</sup>

Things were looking up at the beginning of 1935, as sewing projects, another TERA program, opened up for 72 women at Athens, Englewood, Calhoun, and Riceville who made dresses and other garments for children. A project of constructing outhouses employing 100 men was also initiated. In Etowah, TERA set up a mattress factory to employ 100 women and a few men, with a goal of 800 mattresses per month to be distributed to the needy in McMinn and seven other counties. The bedding replaced in some cases only shucks or old straw in sacks of the coarsest material. The establishment of the factory gave a much needed boost to Etowah economy.<sup>30</sup>

T.B. Ivins, former McMinn County sheriff, was appointed to succeed H.L. Moses as TERA administrator in 1935, and Ivins began working with several projects, with 114 men employed on an Etowah playground, 20 men at Riceville school, and others employed on an Etowah street project and at the courthouse in Athens. There were also 150 men put to work at Etowah on a malaria control project. Moses had started some of these projects before being transferred to Meigs County. The summer of 1935 saw a significant increase in TERA gardens, with 78 acres of county plots and 46 acres of community gardens, employing 104 men and 20 teams of mules.<sup>31</sup>

In the summer of 1935, a new federal agency, the Works Progress



Outhouse constructed by WPA located on farm of Dwain Ealy in the Pond Hill community.  
Courtesy of Bridgett Raper

Administration, took over the work of TERA with T.B. Ivins continuing as director. McMinn County took full advantage of the benefits of WPA. Schools were renovated, athletic fields constructed and a much needed project, a farm-to-market road building program, was initiated. The goal of this project was to improve every county road not in the state system. Many rural roads were in deplorable condition, especially in the winter, and were a constant source of complaint from farmers who found them difficult, if not impossible, to travel. This project was greeted with enthusiasm by rural residents. In building the farm-to-market roads, WPA furnished the labor, and the county furnished machinery and supervision. The project took over six months to complete and furnished jobs to 600 men. When it was completed, there were hundreds of miles of roads improved, and many new ones constructed. A WPA report released through the newspapers stated that the WPA spent \$233,833 and the county \$97,691 on the road project.<sup>32</sup>

Another project that had been needed for many years, that of transcribing county records from longhand to typed copy, was begun by WPA in November 1936. This project, designated as an historical records survey, was under the direction of Miss Iva Maude Lewis and Mrs. Lucile Latham. It consisted of collecting and copying county records from 1819, the year McMinn County was formed, and included court records, marriage licenses, wills, inventories, and inscriptions of tombstones in cemeteries. A copy of these records when completed was sent to the DAR headquarters in Washington, the state archives in Nashville, and the University of Tennessee.<sup>33</sup>

Although criticized by many and the butt of many jokes, the WPA, in addition to providing much-needed jobs for hundreds of unemployed workers, completed many useful and needed projects in McMinn County. According to WPA Director T.B. Ivins, McMinn County labor groups and businesses had benefited to the extent of \$564,303 since the first WPA project was started in McMinn County in November 1935. WPA expenses for labor and materials amounted to \$389,397 with local governments supplying the balance. The projects included improvements on athletic fields at McMinn and Etowah high schools; farm-to-market roads; street improvements; malaria control in Etowah and elsewhere; school improvements in Etowah, Niota, Athens, and Calhoun; sanitation improvements; sewing; and adult education.<sup>34</sup>

The Public Works Administration was set up as one of the earliest New Deal agencies to get people back to work, rather than as an ordinary relief agency. It did not appear in McMinn County until some of the other agencies were well entrenched with relief projects. In January 1935, the PWA approved a \$115,000 sewage system for Etowah in both loan and grants, with the city to pay back 70 percent of the loan in 30 years at three percent interest. Later the PWA approved a \$63,635 waterworks loan for Englewood to employ 70 people. The project consisted of a pumping station and an elevated tank holding 100,000 gallons of water.<sup>35</sup>

Since PWA was not a direct relief agency and was set up for borrowing purposes by municipalities, activities over the county were not as great for this agency as for others. However, Athens and Etowah benefited by receiving aid from the county's \$100,000 bond issue, a loan of \$55,000 from the PWA, and a \$45,000 additional gift. Etowah and McMinn High Schools received gymnasiums and two additional class rooms each, plus equipment. A new elementary school, Ingleside, was constructed in Athens, and the third floor of the courthouse was completed with PWA funds.<sup>36</sup>

One economic group President Roosevelt had particular concern for was the farmer. The nation's farmers were in a desperate situation when he took office and if they were to survive, something had to be done. McMinn farmers mirrored the economic plight nationwide. Between 1929 and 1932 farm prices had plummeted at an alarming rate. Cotton, the county's largest cash crop, fell from 17 cents per pound to 5 cents; tobacco from 25 cents to 13 cents a pound; corn from 96 cents per bushel to 36 cents; and wheat from \$1.29 to 60 cents per bushel. At the same time, farmers' fixed costs, such as interest and taxes, remained about the same. To make matters worse, surpluses carried over from the previous year threatened to depress farm prices even more.<sup>37</sup>

The New Deal was keenly aware of the plight faced by the nation's farmers, and in May 1933, at the urging of President Roosevelt, Congress passed the Agricultural Adjustment Act. Its purpose was to limit production of certain farm products through voluntary contracts with

farmers and thus raise farm prices. To encourage farmers to make necessary reductions, the law provided for direct payments to participating farmers. Originally, the list of farm products to be curtailed included wheat, cotton, corn, hogs, rice, tobacco, and milk, but later other commodities were added.<sup>38</sup>

Cotton was the first commodity to be adjusted under the new agricultural program. A cotton reduction program was launched in McMinn County in the latter part of June, 1933 with a series of farmer meetings conducted by County Agent L.M. Amburgy. At the same time, the county's newspapers conducted a campaign urging farmers to support the Roosevelt administration's cotton reduction program. It was estimated that cotton acreage in the county was some 3,000 acres and that approximately 900 acres would have to be reduced to meet AAA's goal of one-third reduction. Later reports stated this figure was too high as many farmers, because of low prices, had switched to other crops and thus already reduced the amount of cotton grown.<sup>39</sup>

McMinn County farmers generally supported the cotton reduction program, although some did not see the "economic sense" of it. A total of 257 farmers signed cotton contracts with a reduction of 627 acres, receiving \$8,014 in payment from AAA. As cotton had already been planted and was growing before AAA was inaugurated in 1933, farmers either plowed under or, as Fred Robinson of Calhoun did, mowed down part of the crop. The cotton reduction program had a salutary effect upon cotton prices. Cotton, which brought 5 cents a pound in 1932, sold for between 7 cents and 9 cents per pound in 1933, and 12 cents in 1934. Increased prices, stimulated by the cotton reduction program of 1933 and similar acts passed by the Roosevelt administration, resulted in an increased cotton acreage in McMinn County. In 1935, it was reported that 3,622 acres were grown in the county. Local farmers also participated in similar programs for corn, wheat, tobacco, and hogs. Combined payments received by farmers for 1933-1934 crop reductions totaled approximately \$74,000.<sup>40</sup>

But in January 1936, farmers, who had grown accustomed to government subsidies and higher prices, were shocked to learn that the Supreme Court had declared AAA unconstitutional. County Agent Amburgy reported that McMinn farmers were "good and mad" over the court's decision. However, a new act, the Soil Erosion Act of 1936, was put into effect and McMinn farmers once again took advantage of the federal government's program. In December 1936, Amburgy reported that 1,194 farms were under the soil conservation program and that local farmers had earned approximately \$60,000 for soil improvement projects; in 1937, the number rose to 1,591 with \$82,000 in payments. By 1938, more farmers took advantage of the program and the amount of government payments increased to \$92,000.<sup>41</sup>

McMinn County farmers also benefited in other ways during the 1930's:



cheap electricity and fertilizer from TVA, soil erosion control and reforestation from the CCC, and long-term loans from the Farm Security Administration.

As the 1930's came to a close, local farmers agreed that the future looked brighter than it had for several years. They had come a long way since 1933 when they were forced to seek loans because of low farm prices. Although they did not always agree with some of the federal programs, it all balanced out, and farming resumed its place as a major industry in McMinn County.

Local farmers also benefited from another New Deal program, the Civilian Conservation Corps, created in 1933. The purpose of the CCC was to put an army of unemployed youth between the ages of 18 and 25 to work in reforestation and other conservation projects. The Corps was to be a joint effort of the War, Labor, Agriculture, and Interior Departments. The young men were to receive \$30 a month, with \$25 of it going home to parents.

Unemployed McMinn youth eagerly took advantage of the CCC program. When it was announced in early May 1933, over 300 young men signed up for the project within a few days and anxiously waited to be called for work. In mid-May, the first contingent of 24 boys was ordered to Ft. Oglethorpe, Georgia for two weeks of conditioning and conservation training. Others were called to the Corps later.<sup>42</sup>

Two years after the establishment of the Civilian Conservation Corps, McMinn County was selected for a camp site. An announcement in April 1935, stated that a CCC camp was to be located 1½ miles south of Athens on the Lee Highway on a fifteen acre tract owned by G.F. Lockmiller; construction would begin soon. Lockmiller originally purchased the property for the purpose of building a restricted subdivision and constructed two arches at the entrance, but the Depression stopped further building plans. The site, known locally as Billy Goat Hill, was selected after a TVA engineer survey showed it was well suited for a camp with a sloping hill which provided good drainage. According to the local newspaper, Lockmiller leased the property to the federal government for 50 cents an acre per month.<sup>43</sup>

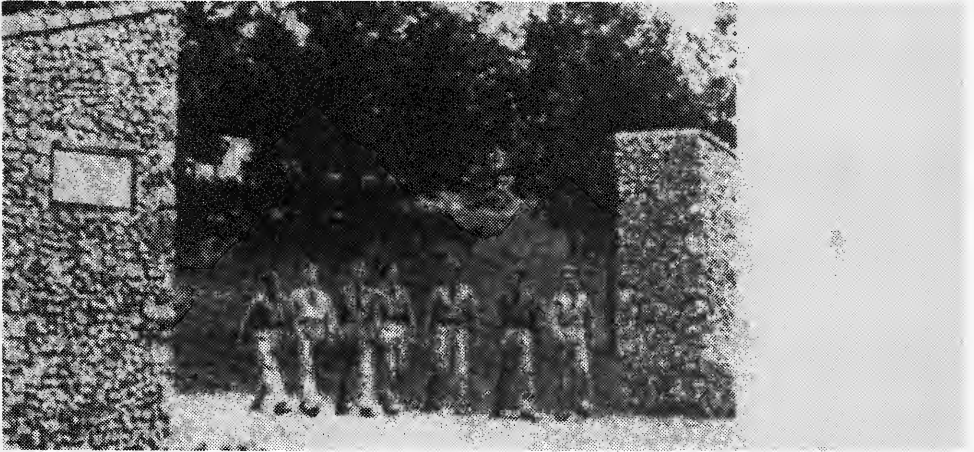
The Tennessee Valley Authority, whose Forestry Division would plan and coordinate the work of the CCC, announced that the camp would be made up of approximately 200 young men and that their work in McMinn County would concentrate on soil erosion control and reforestation. Bare hills were to be reforested and gullies obliterated and returned to their former fertility. It was estimated that approximately 1,200 farms in McMinn County could benefit from the program.<sup>44</sup>

McMinn Countians were elated over the county's selection for the CCC camp and with good cause. The CCC estimated that it would spend approximately \$3,000 a month locally for feeding and caring for the enrollees, and an additional \$3,000 was expected to be spent by the men.



In addition, the county's farmers also would benefit through soil conservation.<sup>45</sup>

The first visible signs of CCC appeared on May 21, 1935, with the arrival of Lieutenant Charles L. Bean and a crew of 20 CCC boys, who set up a temporary camp and immediately began the task of clearing the site, hauling rock, and building roads. Construction of 18 prefabricated buildings began in June at a cost of \$11,000 and were ready for occupancy by mid-July. The camp consisted of four ventilated barracks, each accommodating 50 men, a mess hall, kitchen, hospital, recreational hall, school, barber shop, laundry, canteen, and general offices. Provisions were made for teaching, and a Sunday School class was set up, baseball field laid out, tennis courts built, and a football field made ready.<sup>46</sup>



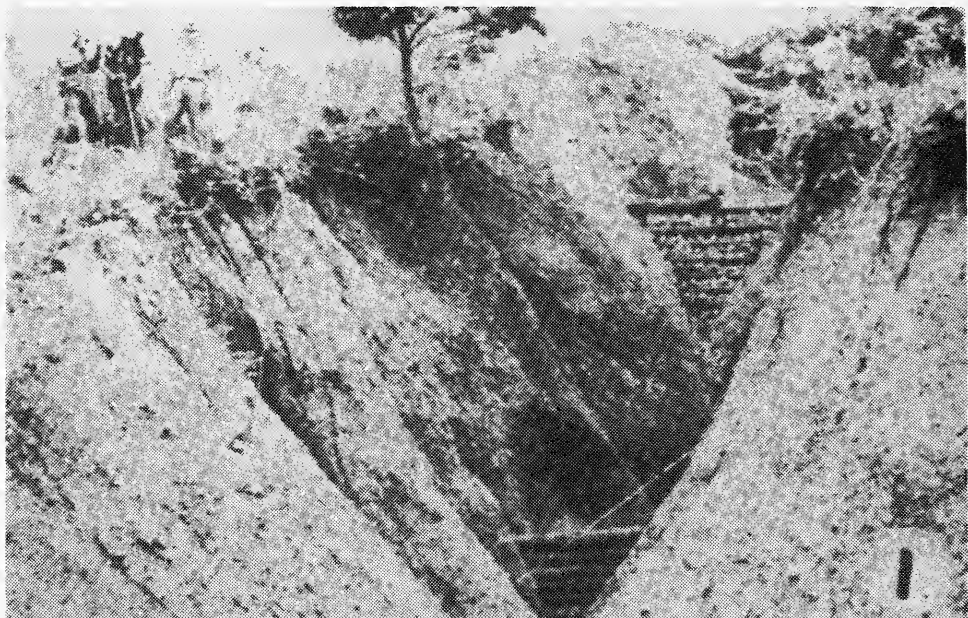
A group of CCC boys, dressed in army khaki uniform, leaving the camp for recreation in Athens.

Courtesy of the E.A. Miller family

While construction of the camp was underway, TVA officials held a meeting of all farmers interested in soil erosion and reforestation to explain the program. Officials stressed the need for cooperation between farmers and the CCC, a must if the project was to be successful, and outlined how farmers could go about making applications for work to be done on their farms. After an application, the officials said, the TVA Forestry Division would make an inspection to make sure the farm qualified. Farmers were to provide teams and brush for gully filling and fencing for the reclaimed land. The gully filling and reforestation would be done by CCC. The reclaimed land had to be withdrawn from cultivation for a period of five years. Interest was high among farmers, and over 100 initially signed up for the program; others were added later.<sup>47</sup>

On July 18 and 19, 1935, 171 enrollees arrived at the Athens camp with Captain John L. Hill, U.S. Army, from North Carolina in charge. Per-

sonnel, other than the enrollees, consisted of a project superintendent, a civil engineer, and four foremen. This contingent was employed by the Forestry Division of TVA. In addition, there were several "experienced" men with various skills who were hired locally and whose job was to serve as a liason between farmer and CCC.<sup>48</sup>



A CCC work crew with forestry supervisor setting tree seedlings along top of badly eroded gully. Note dams built to control further erosion.

Courtesy of the E.A. Miller family

Supervision of the CCC youth was shared by the Forestry Service and the Army. When the men were in the field, they were under the control of the Forestry Service. In camp, they were under the authority of the Army, which had the responsibility of feeding, clothing, and housing the men. The work format called for crews of 20 to 25 with a Forestry Service supervisor in charge. The workday began at 7 a.m., when men were transported in trucks to various farms, and ended at 3 p.m. Young men in each work crew set out approximately 350 seedlings per day.

It was just a few months after Camp Lockmiller was started that a group of CCC boys got into trouble with Athens police when some were arrested on charges of public drunkenness, bringing on a confrontation between Captain Hill, camp commander, and law enforcement officers. Athens police and sheriff's deputies denied that they had arrested the boys. Business and civic leaders gathered to hear Captain Hill's complaints that many arrests were unjustified and uncalled for. The officer further complained that he had been treated very discourteously by an

Athens night policeman. "If Athens permits this kind of business to go on, then our boys must go elsewhere, where they are not harrassed in this manner," said Hill, "and if Athens is barred as a recreational place, buying of supplies will also go."<sup>49</sup>

An Athens business leader, J. Nat Moore, made a plea for full cooperation between Athens people and CCC personnel, stating that the camp was very worthwhile from a business standpoint. He noted that over \$3,200 was being spent in Athens monthly for food and supplies, and by the boys. Beer was being served freely in Athens cafes and beer places, and had been so since the repeal of the 18th Amendment in 1933, he said. In an editorial, *The Daily Post-Athenian* severely criticized the police officers for "fee grabbing," stating that "Athens was getting a bad name all over the state for having more feegrabbing officers than any other town of its size in the U.S."<sup>50</sup>

The pleas for cooperation apparently fell on deaf ears. A few nights later another CCC boy was arrested for drunkenness by sheriff's deputies, a charge vigorously denied by the youth. This incident, said Hill, was the "last straw," and Athens was placed "off limits" to the CCC.<sup>51</sup>

The Athens Kiwanis Club deplored the situation. Harry Johnson, business and civic leader, and others stated that the boys on the whole were a fine lot and were spending their money in Athens, but now they were going to Etowah and Cleveland for their recreation and many of their accounts had been moved from Athens.<sup>52</sup>

Etowah had a different report. More than 100 CCC boys went there on a Saturday for a semi-weekly outing, and received praise from city officials and police officers for their conduct. Etowah was also the Mecca for several Polk County camps on the weekends, since the nearest theatre was there, plus other recreational facilities. The town benefited financially to a great extent from the CCC.<sup>53</sup>

Friction between the Athens camp boys and local law enforcement officers brought an investigation from the Fourth Corps, U.S. Army, which expressed "dissatisfaction" over the arrest of the CCC boys. Resulting fears that the camp might be closed were realized when in October, it was ordered abandoned. There was no explanation for the order, but *The Daily Post-Athenian* said that the arrest of the CCC boys had nothing to do with the camp's closing. Indeed, 12 Tennessee camps were ordered to close by October 31, with caretakers to be employed following evacuation. However, it was later learned that arrest of CCC boys was a major factor in the abandonment of the camp. When the order went out to reduce the number of camps in Tennessee, Athens got the "ax," said the local newspaper.<sup>54</sup>

During its short ten-week existence the CCC camp had hardly had time to make its presence felt in the county. Although several projects were initiated, only four were completed. Many citizens, especially farmers and merchants, were disappointed by its premature closing. However, in

mid-January 1936, McMinn Countians again rejoiced when word was received that a second camp would be opened on a temporary basis with an enrollment expected to eventually reach 100. On January 20, 60 enrollees from the CCC camp in Cleveland, under the command of First Lieutenant B.F. Robinette, a Tennessee Wesleyan College graduate, arrived in Athens and immediately began work on unfinished projects. By April, over 100 acres had been set with 132,000 sprouts, according to the TVA Subdistrict Forester.<sup>55</sup>



CCC boy planting a tree seedling. Over 4,500,000 seedlings were planted on McMinn County farms by the CCC.

Courtesy of the E.A. Miller family

CCC work in McMinn County consisted of reforestation and erosion control. A report described the work of the youth in this way:

Before the regular planting season, which lasts from December to March, the CCC is engaged in the preliminary work of building brush and rock dams. This is followed by tree planting by CCC crews.

On the better grade of soil and in the drain where there is sufficient moisture black locust is planted. On most of the other soil, which includes shale and gravel soil, the short pine is planted. On the poorest, Virginia scrub pine is planted.

On bare sloping land, a matting consisting of pine branches and straw is scattered over the area and wired down. Grass seed is then planted.<sup>56</sup>

The temporary camp was discontinued within a few months, having completed the unfinished projects begun by the first encampment. The work force was transferred back to Cleveland. A permanent camp once again was established in September 1936 with approximately 200 workers under the command of First Lieutenant S.W. Bailey.

Relations between the Athens police and the CCC boys improved, and in April 1937, open house was held at the camp in observance of the fourth anniversary of the CCC organization and to celebrate the camp's winning a pennant for being the most outstanding unit in their 11-camp district. Lt. R.E. Leonard, then in charge, reported that the payroll for March was \$1,600.<sup>57</sup>

Education was stressed at the camp with night classes taught on a variety of subjects. Many of the young men took advantage of these courses in preparation for jobs after they left the Corps. Courses taught,



A crew of CCC boys at work on a McMinn County farm.

Courtesy of the E.A. Miller family

in addition to the basic course of reading, writing, and arithmetic, included typing, shorthand, bookkeeping, photography, engineering, mechanics, woodworking, soil conservation, masonry, leadership, and surveying.

In April 1938, according to the *Etowah Enterprise*, some 1,500 people gathered at the Polk County camp at Archville, just across the McMinn County line, to help the boys celebrate CCC's fifth anniversary with a big birthday party. This showed the high esteem in which most CCC enrollees were held by the public at large.

The Athens CCC camp remained in operation until July 1942. In addition to the financial contribution, the CCC brought important benefits to McMinn County in the area of conservation. During its operation from July 1935 to July 1942, over 4,500,000 tree seedlings were planted in the county. Farmers, especially, were lavish in their praise for the work done on McMinn farms, and businesses in the county were in agreement that the CCC project had been most helpful. The county also benefited in another way from the CCC. Several of the young men stationed at the camp married local girls and settled in the county.<sup>58</sup>

A former CCC member, Ruben Holland of Waverly, Tennessee, who was stationed at several camps before being transferred to Athens, said that the CCC did a great deal for him and was the best thing that happened to boys without jobs during the 1930's. Austin Tallent, a native of McMinn County who was stationed at Tellico and Reelfoot Lake, said the CCC was the finest thing that happened to him; it taught discipline and pride. Through the Corps, he was able to obtain most of his education and was able to help his family back home. This was the same story dozens of others told of what the CCC had meant to them.<sup>59</sup>

Another New Deal agency attempted to serve the interests of young people in the county. The National Youth Administration, established in June 1935 as an agency within the Works Progress Administration, was designed to provide aid to unemployed young people out of school and to give assistance to students who required aid to remain in school. It was termed by many as the "little boys' project," but it had good results. Student aid provided by the NYA proved to be a morale booster for McMinn County young people. It also provided a means for many to continue their education beyond the high school level who otherwise would not have been able to do so.

As soon as the program was understood locally, the county superintendent of schools, Will J. Swafford, called a meeting of all principals and outlined the program. High school students 16 years of age and over from families on relief rolls, in return for work which would not interfere with class, were eligible to receive \$6.00 a month from the federal government. The work was to include tasks such as beautifying school grounds, clerical and library work, and janitorial services. Initially, the county received a quota for 43 to fill these jobs.<sup>60</sup>



Another NYA project was made available for youth who had completed their education. It consisted of building a fish pond on land donated to the county by Charlie Scott. The boys were to build a concrete dam and a runway. The pond was to produce 30,000 fish to be used in restocking streams in the area. The NYA was to pay for the labor, and materials were to come from the sportsmen in the county. Although 132 workers were authorized for this project, and even though transportation to the site was furnished, only a few showed up, and the project eventually was discontinued.<sup>61</sup>

An NYA project in Etowah produced better results. There the youth built the Boy Scout Lodge on the grounds of the junior high school which has been the headquarters of Etowah Scouts since July 1937. It is one of the most imposing buildings in town.<sup>62</sup>

One New Deal program, however, outweighed all others in terms of its impact on the county — TVA. In a move toward a “balanced civilization,” with the Tennessee River Basin as an experiment, the Tennessee Valley Authority Act was passed on May 18, 1933, solely for the purpose of bringing the people of an impoverished area to a standard of better living via cheap electric power for their farms and homes, flood control of their streams, small industries where surplus labor might be employed, and prosperity for the people from profits from sales of electric energy by TVA.

In the face of opposition from private power companies over the nation, Senator George Norris of Nebraska took up the fight to get the Tennessee Valley Authority Bill passed. It was known as the Norris Bill, and the senator was happy when it passed by a vote of 63 to 20 in the U.S. Senate. “It is emblematic,” said Norris, “of the dawning of that day when every rippling stream that flows down the mountainside and winds its way through the meadows to the sea shall be harnessed and made to work for the welfare of man.”

Between 1933 and 1936 when the first dam, Norris in Anderson County, was completed, many from McMinn County found employment there during construction; but no one had the vaguest idea that this movement, started to help people of the Tennessee Valley, would someday provide the most powerful public utility in the world.

McMinn County was enjoying a benefit of TVA even before Norris Dam was completed. There was a flurry of real estate transactions locally as several Norris families, displaced by the project, bought land and began farming. TVA also aided the county by sponsoring demonstration farms. In 1935, it gave fertilizer to be used on farm demonstrations, the fertilizer’s strength being nearly four times that available commercially. By October of that year, 62 demonstration farms in the county shared in a gift of six carloads of fertilizer from TVA at Muscle Shoals, Alabama, to be used on pastures and for soil erosion control.<sup>63</sup>

McMinn Countians were given an additional boost by mid-year of 1936

when they saw TVA power lines being built. There were some 35 miles of lines to be strung in the county, with more than 400 homes in west McMinn scheduled to be wired. Electrifying the farm homes was expected to revolutionize the life of the rural householder.

It was thus a big day in McMinn County on September 28, 1936 when **The Daily Post-Athenian** headlined the story that TVA electricity had been turned on in the western half of McMinn, the switch being thrown in Decatur in nearby Meigs County. At that time 55 men from McMinn County were being employed by TVA.<sup>64</sup>

During the same year, a new federal agency appeared providing another great boon to the county — the Rural Electrification Administration which had the backing of another agency, the Electric Home and Farm Authority. It was to set up electric cooperatives in various counties to serve the rural communities over the nation.

The Volunteer Electric Cooperative with headquarters at Decatur served rural McMinn, Polk, and Meigs counties. Then the incorporated towns of McMinn County came in for a "shot in the arm," when in 1939 TVA purchased Tennessee Electric Power Company, headquartered at Chattanooga, the supplier of electric power for all of McMinn and surrounding counties. This enabled the municipalities to have not only cheaper power but an unlimited quantity.

On January 17, 1940, the city of Athens passed a resolution authorizing formal application to TVA for purchasing power, and shortly thereafter adopted another resolution authorizing the purchase of all properties and franchises owned by Tennessee Electric Power Company. Athens then set up the Athens Utilities Board and borrowed \$410,000 to finance the purchase of TEPCO properties. Soon afterwards Etowah signed an agreement with TVA to use their power, buying the necessary properties owned by Tennessee Electric Power Company. Similar arrangements were made in Englewood and Niota.<sup>65</sup>

Later both Athens and Etowah, through bond issues, became municipal owners of their own utility systems. These included both electricity and water, and in later years natural gas. In 1939, the city of Etowah purchased the Etowah Water and Light Company which had been organized in 1912. Niota and Englewood bought direct power from TVA, with Calhoun and Riceville being served by the electric cooperative.

Prosperity was settling on McMinn County as industry was given new life and farm products were being sold again in large quantities. Freight trains moving along the Southern Railway and L&N tracks were getting longer and more frequent. The Strand Theatre at Athens and the Gem Theatre at Etowah were showing to large crowds of paying customers.

There was money in the pockets of workers who only a few months before had been on relief rolls. When McMinn County received its "second blessing" from TVA in the announcement that Watts Bar Dam would be built on the Tennessee River in adjoining Meigs and Rhea



counties, and that 400 McMinn Countians would be employed at the dam site at \$3.80 per hour, there was more rejoicing of the people who saw brighter days ahead.

The TVA dam near Spring City was just the beginning of a series of TVA dams and hydro-electric power plants on the Tennessee River and its tributaries, the Hiwassee, Ocoee, Holston, and Tellico rivers, all of which played their part in giving McMinn County the highest standard of living the people had ever seen or hoped for.

Paul J. Walker, former mayor of Athens, who started an insurance agency in 1931 and a few years later the Athens Federal Savings and Loan, had first hand experience with the conditions of the Depression. When Walker heard of a New Deal program, the purpose of which was to help working people own their homes, he contacted the Federal Home Loan Bank in Washington, got its plans of action, and petitioned for a charter that would establish Athens Federal Savings and Loan Association which opened for business in June 1934.<sup>66</sup>

With 50 people signing a letter of intent to start a savings account of \$5.00 and then add \$5.00 a month thereafter, Athens Federal Savings and Loan was able to secure sufficient federal money to make necessary loans. The phenomenal growth of this one business concern, and the growth of Athens and other communities in McMinn County in general, stems from the fact that it took several "shots in the arm" from federal agencies to get things going and on an even keel.<sup>67</sup>

Within a few months after the federal government stepped in to stem the tide of the Depression in early 1933, business and industry began to show improvement. One Athens firm, a table manufacturing company, experienced a sudden surge in orders ironically after beer was again legalized. Orders for special drinking tables came in from coast to coast. The two leading mills at Englewood, both textile, which had operated infrequently during the early years of the Depression, began operating full time again. Athens factories began to recall laid-off workers. The Athens Woolen Mill, which had been idle for six months, resumed operation. A new hosiery mill, Judith, opened in Niota in 1936 and Crescent Hosiery expanded its operations and employed additional workers. Etowah regained some stability when Sportswear Hosiery Mill, employing 150 workers, began operations in 1938.<sup>68</sup>

McMinn County began to feel the effects of New Deal programs as early as June 1933. Fred Wankan, editor of *The Daily Post-Athenian*, summed up what was happening as result of government assistance when he editorialized: "We are now in the dawn of a new day." A few weeks later he again wrote: "New Deal effect is now in evidence in McMinn. The New Deal is reaching into the homes of 30,000 McMinn Countians, affecting laborers, businessmen, farmers, and manufacturers ... The freedom that is being enjoyed by the working class, increased wages and shorter hours, has brought about a feeling of exhilaration that has not



**Sewing Room, Judith Hosiery Mill, Niota.**

**Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Glenn M. Webb**



**Outside view of Judith Hosiery Mill, Niota.**

**Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Glenn M. Webb**

been present in years."<sup>69</sup>

Other local and county newspaper headlines chronicled progress made in McMinn County:

Merchants Had Lot To Cheer About At Christmas (DPA, 12-21-33)

Trade Booms As Yuletide Shopping Ends (DPA, 12-22-33)

Building Activity In Athens At Record (DPA, 4-26-35)

New Hosiery Mill To Open In Athens (DPA, 4-29-35)

Mill At Englewood To Reopen (DPA, 6-6-35)

Signs of Improvement In Etowah (EE, 10-31-35)

New Hospital Planned For Athens (DPA, 9-18-35)

Niota Bank Pays First Cash Dividend Since 1931 (DPA, 1-2-36)

Workers Influx Causes Housing Shortage in Calhoun (DPA, 3-13-36)

Many New Businesses Open in Athens (DPA, 3-13-36)

Calhoun Stirs As Buildings Become Acute (DPA 4-1-36)

McMinn Towns on Upswing: Depression Passing Into History (DPA, 8-26-36)

2 Local Railroads Report Record Business (DPA, 9-4-36)

Etowah Industrial Committee To Erect New Building (EE, 12-2-37)

Addition To Chilhowee Mills Announced (DPA, 3-30-38)

Newspaper headlines continued through 1938, 1939, and 1940 chronicling improvements on every front in McMinn County.

Athens, Englewood, Etowah, and Niota, where industry was heaviest, showed the greatest growth and quickest return to an apparent normalcy. Athens experienced a complete turn around among its several industries as sales increased sufficiently to provide for a marked increase in employment. Bank statements indicated an increase in the volume of business.

The payroll in McMinn County had increased by \$500,000 since 1934, and the 1939 payroll was estimated at \$2,000,000. This was partially attributed to multiple expansions in Athens industries and the new industries at Englewood, Etowah, and Niota.<sup>70</sup>

As Athens was announcing major business establishments, such as Woolworth's, Proffitt's, and others opening on the Square, Etowah was announcing Miller Bros. Department Store's opening on Tennessee Avenue. Postmaster D.B. Todd announced that postal receipts had brought the Etowah post office back into the second class status.

As the decade of the 1930's swiftly moved into the next, signaling the official end of the Depression as far as McMinn County was concerned, it was apparent that the United States Government had done its share in giving the people an opportunity to forge ahead on their own initiative. McMinn County moved into an envious position of leadership in the state on a strictly "derring-do" basis as history later revealed.

## NOTES

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3. **Ibid.**, 16 March 1933.
4. **Ibid.**, 15 March, 19 May 1933.
5. **Ibid.**, 1 June, 1933.
6. **Ibid.**, 26 July, 1933.
7. **Ibid.**, 11 August, 1933.
8. **Minutes McMinn County Quarterly Court**, 18 August 1933.
9. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 12 September 1933.
10. **Ibid.**, 24 August 1933.
11. **Ibid.**
12. **Etowah Enterprise**, 7, 21, 28 September 1933.
13. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 15, 16 August 1933.
14. **Ibid.**, 17 August 1933.
15. **Ibid.**, 21 November 1933; Fred Wankan, Sr., interview, 17 November 1982.
16. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 28, 29 November 1933.
17. **Ibid.**, 1, 11 December 1933.
18. **Ibid.**, 28 December 1933.
19. **Ibid.**, 12, 14 December 1933.
20. **Ibid.**, 21 December 1933.
21. **Ibid.**, 9, 22 January 1934.
22. **Ibid.**, 15, 16, 27 February 1934.
23. **Ibid.**, 5 March 1934.
24. Wankan interview; **Daily Post-Athenian.**, 14 March 1934.
25. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 23 May 1934.
26. **Ibid.**, 8 February 1934; Wankan interview.
27. Wankan interview; **Daily Post-Athenian**, 2 January, 8 February 1934.
28. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 31 May 1934.
29. **Ibid.**, 18 July 1934; **Etowah Enterprise**, 6 June 1935.
30. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 24 January 1935.
31. **Ibid.**, 30 April 1935.
32. **Ibid.**, 6 November 1935, 11 November 1937.
33. **Ibid.**, 20 November 1936.
34. **Ibid.**, 9 January 1939.
35. Mack Reynolds, interview, 18 May 1983; **Daily Post-Athenian**, 23 November 1936; **Etowah Enterprise**, 17 January 1935.
36. **Etowah Enterprise**, 17 January 1935; **Daily Post-Athenian**, 9 October 1935, 12 October 1936.
37. **Agricultural Trends in Tennessee**, Department of Agriculture, State of Tennessee, (1958), 24-29; Mortimer Trew, telephone conversation, 15 September 1983.

38. Minton, *New Deal in Tennessee*, 119.
39. *Daily Post-Athenian*, 26, 28 June 1933.
40. *Ibid.*, 6 July 1937; Fred Robinson, interview, 25 July 1983.
41. *Daily Post-Athenian*, 6 July 1937.
42. *Ibid.*, 5, 15 May 1933.
43. *Ibid.*, 8 April 1935; *Etowah Enterprise*, 11 April 1935.
44. *Etowah Enterprise*, 1 August 1935.
45. *Daily Post-Athenian*, 2 April 1935.
46. *Ibid.*, 8, 22 May, 9 September 1935; *Etowah Enterprise*, 23 May 1935.
47. *Daily Post-Athenian*, 25 June, 1, 18 July 1935.
48. *Ibid.*, 18, 19 July, 5 September 1935.
49. *Ibid.*, 19 September 1935.
50. *Ibid.*, 23 September 1935.
51. *Ibid.*
52. *Ibid.*, 2 October 1935.
53. *Ibid.*
54. *Ibid.*, 8, 15 October 1935, 25 August 1936.
55. *Ibid.*, 16, 20 January, 1 April 1936.
56. *Ibid.*, 14 June 1937.
57. *Ibid.*, 1 April 1937.
58. *Annual Report of Watershed Protection Division*, Department of Forestry, TVA, 1 July 1942-30 June 1943.
59. Ruben Holland, interview, 16 May 1983; Austin Tallent, interview, 4 April 1983.
60. *Daily Post-Athenian*, 1 October 1935.
61. *Ibid.*, 21 January 1936.
62. Kenneth Barker, interview, 18 November 1982.
63. *Daily Post-Athenian*, 4 October 1935.
64. *Ibid.*, 28 September 1936.
65. *Minutes Athens Board of Aldermen*, 17 January, 5 June 1939.
66. Paul J. Walker, interview, 10 May 1983.
67. *Ibid.*
68. *Daily Post-Athenian*, 2 May 1933; Helen Collins, interview, 14 August 1983.
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## **Chapter 3**

### **THE DEPRESSION HITS HOME**

**By Laura Fisher Brown**

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Many writers have created the impression that life during the 1930's was dismal and filled with despair, gloom, and doom. While this characterization was doubtless true for many parts of the country, it was not generally the case in McMinn County. Throughout the Depression, most people maintained a fairly good sense of humor, a positive outlook, and an ability to laugh and to have a good time in spite of economic hardships. The prevailing attitude in the 1930's was perhaps best summed up by W.P. Chesnutt, Sr. who noted, "The most remarkable part of the whole period of the deep Depression was that people stayed in a most pleasant frame of mind."<sup>1</sup>

Life was indeed difficult for many people due to the lack of steady employment and income, and making a living was a major concern. Losing one's job was a traumatic experience. Unemployment left families in shock and worrying about the source of the next meal. In Etowah, unemployed railroad men begged fellow workers to lay off for one day and allow them to take their place in order to earn money for food. Even those men who had jobs felt insecure, fearing that it would not be long until they too would join the ranks of the unemployed.<sup>2</sup>

Anyone needing extra labor was sure to find it at whatever price he could afford to pay. Men, skilled and unskilled, accepted any type of work available, at any rate of pay they could get, and for any length of time, one hour or one day. Individuals worked on farms from sunup to sundown

for fifty cents a day. Women worked in laundries for ten cents an hour, took in washing, and did sewing. Some picked blackberries and sold them for ten cents a gallon. Other women, particularly blacks, worked as maids in private homes for three dollars a week. Boys and girls helped their families make ends meet by working for five or ten cents an hour, doing any chore which might be available. At the age of ten, Charlie Morris worked on a dairy farm for five cents an hour while his older brother received ten cents. As a young schoolboy, Rex Moses felt himself fortunate to be able to work as a janitor in his school for thirty cents a day. His job consisted of building and maintaining three fires, one in each room, and of cleaning the school building. He also cut and sold firewood and trapped rabbits which he sold for twenty cents each. After the death of his father, Bill Selden helped his mother support the family by carrying newspapers for \$2.50 per week.<sup>3</sup>

Government relief jobs were highly sought after. Such employment provided by local, state, and federal government—the TERA, CWA, and WPA—paid from five to fifteen dollars a week and was a blessing for many families needing income.

The barter system became strongly entrenched in McMinn County during the thirties. As the Depression tightened its grip and money became scarce, many people turned to this means of survival. Men swapped a day's labor in return for wood, corn, wheat, meat, or anything else they needed. Doctors and dentists bartered their services for chickens, ham, a cow, or some handiwork. Merchants traded merchandise for other items. Fred Wankan, owner and publisher of *The Daily Post-Athenian*, accepted practically anything — canned fruit, dried peaches and apples, fresh eggs, hens, popcorn, black walnuts, wheat, corn, molasses, and wood — in return for a \$1.50 subscription to the newspaper. In the fall and winter of 1931-32, he exchanged newspapers for more than two hundred gallons of sorghum molasses which he sold, swapped, or gave away from Maine to California.<sup>4</sup>

In some homes hunger was just a meal away, but for most food was not a problem. Practically every home had a garden, and there was generally an adequate supply of fresh vegetables during the gardening season. Families made sure that not only was enough food grown for consumption during the spring and summer but that there was plenty available for home canning in preparation for fall and winter. It was not uncommon for a housewife to can three hundred or more quarts of vegetables.<sup>5</sup>

Many families had to go on relief of one kind or another during the Depression. Initially, the McMinn County Quarterly Court provided a monthly allowance of four dollars to destitute families, but later, because of the county's financial condition, the amount was reduced to three dollars. This type of relief was dispensed in the form of warrants which were redeemed by merchants. Through the Red Cross, food items such as

flour, meat, and lard were distributed to needy families, the amount of the allotment depending upon the size of the family. A 24-pound bag of flour was to last two people over 12 years of age for two weeks. Families were urged not to have flour bread more than once a day.<sup>6</sup>

The penalty for receiving relief was severe. Individuals who purchased tobacco or any non-necessity were denied relief. A stiffer penalty came in the loss of self-respect. Many could not bring themselves to accept anything for which they had not worked, for charity was to them a disgrace and an admission of failure. There was something wrong about standing in line for a handout. One man remembered an occasion when he stood in line to receive flour. "It was terrible," he said; his pride would not let him go back again. Men wrapped food items in newspapers to carry home in an attempt to keep others from knowing that they had been in the relief line. Relief flour was often carried over the shoulder with the Red Cross insignia turned down. Many people paid a high psychological price for something monetarily free.<sup>7</sup>

The Depression, however, was also a time of cheerful sharing. If, for example, one had more potatoes than needed, the surplus would be given to another family which, in turn, might share beans, fruit, milk, or meat. If someone heard of others in need, he took them food or clothing if he had these to share. People were concerned about each other and showed this concern by dividing whatever they had to help someone in distress.<sup>8</sup>

While food for a well-balanced diet was not a serious problem for most families, others were not so fortunate. For Amy Johnson's family, the 1930's became the "pumpkin depression" as the family ate pumpkin cooked in every conceivable way--fried, baked, broiled, in pies, and in bread. A sizeable number of families who were forced to subsist on a monotonous diet of cornbread and one or two other foods, often fatback and molasses, succumbed to pellagra, a disease caused from a diet insufficient in vitamins B and G. In 1931, 250 cases of pellagra were reported in the county, and many cases were probably not reported. Children were especially susceptible to the disease. Treatment consisted of two teaspoons of powdered yeast three times a day for six to ten weeks, along with a properly balanced diet of fresh vegetables. The Red Cross made garden plots available to those families who were without a source of vegetables.<sup>9</sup>

When food was not available, some individuals resorted to stealing, a practice which was rampant during the thirties. One father, with two accomplices, broke into a grocery store in Riceville and took several items of food. When officers arrested him, they found his children cold and hungry. "I took the groceries for their sake," confessed the desperate father. "My little children were hungry; we had nothing to eat." Desperation forced a 12-year-old boy to steal two ducks from a neighbor. "We were hungry...my mother, little sister and I...and had nothing to eat," the youth sobbed to the juvenile judge. After investigating the boy's



home life, the judge decided on a sentence of six years in the state industrial school. The little sister was sent to a Nashville institution, and the mother, whose husband had deserted the family and who was in poor health, was sent to the county poor farm to become a ward of the county.<sup>10</sup>

Neighbors were often willing to give assistance, but many needy persons were too proud to ask for help. One woman recalls the story of an unemployed railroad worker, a friend and co-worker of her father, who had been hired to work occasionally on the father's farm. One day the farm owner saw the man taking corn from the field. He said nothing to the man but was hurt that his friend would steal rather than ask him for food. Jessie McCurdy related the story of a railroad man who noticed that his coal pile was dwindling too rapidly. When he discovered that his unemployed neighbor was taking the coal, he simply made arrangements for a ton of coal to be delivered to the man's home anonymously. Mrs. John Palmer heard of a family in dire need and went to investigate. She found a home with no heat, no furniture, no food, and a boy of about 13 who was sick with flu and lying on the floor with a single ragged quilt for warmth. Mrs. Palmer promptly ordered a ton of coal and bought a supply of groceries for the family. Such was the generosity of many people during hard times.<sup>11</sup>

In 1933, the county farm was converted into a temporary orphanage where children without parents could be cared for until homes for them could be found. The chairman of the McMinn County Court, J.J. Ward, issued a call to citizens asking that their homes be opened to the little ones. He made repeated efforts to get the children into state institutions, but there was no room.<sup>12</sup>

Beginning in 1938, strong community assistance was given to the needy through the Community Chest which made appeals for the donation of clothing and household necessities. Volunteer workers were at the American Legion building to receive applications for assistance and to investigate cases reported. The Child Welfare Circle also assisted families in need. One family was found living in a one-room chicken house at the rear of a business building near the L & N railroad station in Athens. The only furnishings in the room were a bed where all four members of the family slept, a small cook stove which also served to provide heat, a chair, and an improvised table. Cracks in the walls allowed wind, rain, and cold air to enter. Both of the two children were sick, one with pneumonia. The father was unemployed.<sup>13</sup>

For most people, clothing seemed harder to come by than food. One woman remembers that for her the worst thing about the Depression was the shabby clothing she had to wear. "You can't imagine the psychological effect this had on me as a teen-ager," she recalls. With little or no money with which to buy clothing, many people resorted to wearing anything they could get and felt lucky to have a pair of shoes. In 1935 it was reported that a large number of children were still going

barefoot as late as the middle of December. A mother often washed the only dress or shirt or pair of overalls at night so that a family member would have a clean outfit the next day for school or church. Children dropped out of school because of the lack of shoes or other clothing, and parents and children stopped going to church because of shabby clothes.<sup>14</sup>

Families, relatives and friends freely shared clothing. Hand-me-downs were the order of the day. When these were not available, housewives created their own fashions out of whatever was available. One man remembered wearing the shirt his mother made from fertilizer sacks with "16% phosphate" emblazoned on the back. A lady who was well off during the twenties lost her husband to a heart attack and the business he owned to the Depression. Finding herself suddenly widowed and with two children to rear, she made her daughter's clothing while her son bought his own from money earned carrying the newspaper. Her own clothing problem was solved when wealthy friends in Mississippi sent her their daughter's outgrown clothing. She received beautiful dresses, and, in view of her financial condition, she often wondered if people thought she was a "kept woman."<sup>15</sup>

The 1930's was a time to "use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without." Housewives made clothing for themselves and their families out of figured feed and flour sacks. Plain sacks were dyed the desired color. Clothes were patched, and then the patches were patched. In 1932, the editor of *The Daily Post-Athenian* urged readers to look through closets, to make over last year's winter dress, and to join the "hard times style review." For families who qualified, materials for clothing were made available by the government. Cloth provided included prints, gingham, muslin, outing flannel, shirting, and birdseye to be used to make items such as men's and boy's shirts, slips for women and girls, and night clothing for men, women, and children.<sup>16</sup>

The 1930's would have been much more difficult for many families had it not been for the untiring efforts of Miss Myrtle Webb, Home Demonstration Agent for McMinn County. Through her knowledge and her assistance in bringing extension specialists from the University of Tennessee, women were taught the proper methods of caring for milk, of preserving all types of food, of providing proper diets, of growing gardens, and of making full use of supplies. Women were taught how to alter old garments, how to make hats and bottoms for chairs from shucks, and how to make curtains, chair covers, and bedspreads from sacks. She worked ardently to establish strong home demonstration clubs throughout the county. In 1931, 600 women were organized in 26 clubs. By 1939, the number of clubs had grown to 52 with a membership of over 1,000. Miss Webb was also responsible for expanding the number of 4-H Clubs in the county.<sup>17</sup>

Through the home demonstration clubs, women were taught how to make children's Christmas gifts such as rag dolls and stuffed animals. In



**Miss Myrtle Webb, home demonstration agent during the 1930's, made life easier for homemakers.**

**Courtesy of Jessica Schultz**

1935, the county clubs affiliated with Southern Mountain Guild in order to provide a market for the handicrafts of the club women.

Miss Webb headed the annual Better Home Campaign, a national project designed to improve home life. In 1931, McMinn County ranked second in the state in participation. In 1940, the Better Home Campaign stressed mattress-making and established a goal of 500 mattresses for the county. Over 1,100 women signed up for the project which had a two-fold purpose, to provide better sleeping facilities and to make use of surplus cotton.<sup>18</sup>

Miss Webb's work did not go unnoticed. In 1933, *The Daily Post-Athenian* announced that through the excellent work of Miss Webb the United States Extension Service had selected McMinn County as the site for the production of a film to be shown throughout the nation. The movie, filmed in the backyard of Mrs. H.A. Vestal's home on Ingleside Avenue,

depicted women beautifying their homes economically by making shuck-bottomed chairs and twine-bottomed footstools. Participants included Mrs. Horace Long, Ruth Brewer, Prella Johnson, Sallie Lockmiller, and Nan and Grace Chesnutt.<sup>19</sup>

In summing up Miss Webb's work, Zula Campbell said, "Miss Myrtle did a wonderful job of teaching women how to make things and to grow things, how to do with what they had." Through her hard work, Miss Webb made life easier for numerous families during the Depression. Ironically, in an effort to save money during the early thirties, a few members of the county court attempted to abolish her position.<sup>20</sup>

The institution of marriage was dealt a severe setback by the Depression. The sharpest decline in the number of marriages occurred between 1930 and 1933 with an average yearly reduction of 22 percent as compared with the years before the Depression. Beginning in 1933, the number of marriages began to increase but took another nose dive in 1937. From 1938 until 1940, the number slightly exceeded the 1929 figure.<sup>21</sup>

The worst month and year for marriages was May of 1932 with only seven recorded. One observer noted that "while there were many fond-beating hearts, little Dan Cupid could not beat the Depression." Court Clerk John E. Anderson said, "They're just not getting married. I mean by that, most of them could get money to buy a license, but most of them have no prospect for the future."<sup>22</sup>

There was also some decline in the number of births in the county during the Depression. The average annual birth rate prior to 1930 was 655, while the average annual birth rate for 1930-40 was 616, a decline of six percent.<sup>23</sup>

Medical treatment was available to those who needed it even though many patients did not have money to pay. Office calls were one dollar; house calls two dollars. Doctors did not turn patients away but bartered their services for whatever they could get, usually foodstuff.

Apparently the practice of medicine was the only area that did not have an excess of job seekers during the thirties. According to a letter from the University of Tennessee Medical School in Memphis, the county needed six additional physicians in 1930. There were 22 in the county, but census figures of that year indicated that 28 were needed to adequately serve the population. However, the Depression helped to alleviate the workload of the 22 doctors for many people did not seek medical treatment.<sup>24</sup>

Ironically, the first hospitals in McMinn County were established during the Depression. Prior to 1929, several physicians had beds and facilities in their homes or offices for overnight patients, and some patients were sent to Chattanooga or to Knoxville. The first hospital opened in 1929 in a two-story brick building, built by Dr. P.E. Parker, which was located on Fifth Street near the Etowah Junior High School. At first this hospital did a thriving business, but as the Depression grew worse, fewer and fewer patients were able to afford hospital care, and it

was closed. The hospital was reopened in 1935 by Dr. Spencer B. McClary and Dr. Boyd McClary who operated a clinic on Ohio Avenue next to the office of the **Etowah Enterprise**.<sup>25</sup>

Two hospitals opened in Athens in the 1930's. The Foree brothers, Dr. Carey and Dr. Ed, opened a hospital in April, 1930, charging five dollars a day for a room. According to Dr. Carey, "Nobody who came to the hospital needing help was turned away, not even if he didn't have a nickel." A second hospital in Athens, a twenty-bed facility, was opened by Dr. Roy Epperson in January, 1936. The hospital was partially built by patients who swapped their labor for medical services. Mrs. Lorene Epperson, widow of Dr. Epperson, described the hospital lobby as looking and sounding like a poultry house at times as patients brought chickens to pay the doctor. Some brought vegetables, canned goods, meat, anything edible. One man brought a large live cat fish! Food received from patients was used to feed patients and nurses who were provided quarters in the hospital.<sup>26</sup>

It was unusual for people to go to the hospital in the 1930's. Usually only a very serious illness caused a person to seek hospital care. This was partly due to lack of money but also to the fact that people were unaccustomed to being hospitalized and preferred treatment at home. Whatever ailment they had they treated with home remedies as best they could.

The charge for delivering a baby ranged from 15 dollars to 25 dollars and often was done in the home. One man recalls the birth of his second son in 1932 and the doctor who came and spent the night waiting for the arrival. On the morning after the birth the proud father informed the doctor that he had no money but that he did have a few cows and that the doctor might choose one. "Don't you know he picked out the best one I had!" chuckled the farmer.<sup>27</sup>

Doctors gave freely of themselves during the Depression. Often a doctor would make no charge for his services to patients known to have serious financial problems. Physicians also held free immunization clinics and free examinations for school children in order to insure that all members of the community had access to medical treatment.

Dentists also had their problems. They could not collect bills owed them nor could patients pay cash. Like their medical colleagues they bartered their services for whatever they could get.

In 1933, hard times forced Athens dentists to announce a curtailment of services for those who were in arrears on their dental bills. It was agreed that every 30 days each dentist would furnish to all other dentists a list of those who had owed dental bills for six months or longer and had made no satisfactory arrangement for payment. All dentists would refuse further credit until bills were paid in full.<sup>28</sup>

A new dentist trying to establish a practice had particular difficulty. Dr. H.R. Thomas, a native of Etowah, set up his practice in Athens in

1929. As a young dentist who had gone into debt for equipment and office rent, he had to struggle to make payments because patients could not pay. During some months he felt fortunate to be able to deposit 40 dollars in the bank. His fees were certainly not exorbitant, at least by present standards, for the customary fee for tooth extraction in the 1930's was one dollar.<sup>29</sup>

Dr. Thomas swapped dental services for everything from manure to a billy goat. It was not long before he realized that he did not need the goat. Sometimes a patient might bring four hens to pay for a tooth extraction; at other times, payment might be vegetables or a ham. "We ate more ham during the Depression than at any time since," said Dr. Thomas. He was able to trade dental work for music and dancing lessons for his three daughters, and a carpenter built the dentist's first home in exchange for dental service. At one point in the 1930's, Dr. Thomas attempted to get a job with the federal government working as a dentist on an Indian reservation, but did not get the job because too many applications were ahead of his.<sup>30</sup>

Much has been written about the dismal aspects of the Depression, leaving the impression that families enjoyed little in the way of entertainment and recreation. Such was not the case in McMinn County. Plenty of recreation was available, and people freely participated in a variety of activities which provided a psychological lift, making life not only tolerable but even enjoyable.

The scarcity of money did not prevent people from having a good time and from participating in many social and cultural events. The Depression proved that one could be broke and still enjoy life. Contrary to what many writers have said, hard times did not cause people to withdraw into a shell; at least this was not the case locally. When a public event was held, hundreds, even thousands, attended. For example, in June, 1931, 1,000 attended homecoming at Rogers Creek Church, the largest number in the church's history. On one occasion, 3,500 attended the ever-popular McMinn County Singing Convention. The dedication of the bandstand, built by band members, at the L&N Park in Etowah drew a crowd of 1,000 in April, 1933. Three thousand spectators showed up at the same park for a softball game between the Etowah Wildcatters and the Dixie Spinners from Chattanooga.<sup>31</sup>

Civic clubs and schools sponsored a variety of recreational and cultural activities. The Etowah Kiwanis Club presented a play, *Mollie Ticklepitcher*, in January, 1938, drawing an appreciative audience of over 900. When the Athens Kiwanis Club sponsored the *Passion Play* in 1935 with 75 local actors under the direction of J. Roger Carroll of Tennessee Wesleyan College, two performances drew crowds of over 1,000. A large number of viewers attended *Rainbow's End* at the Athens City School Auditorium. Participants from grades one to four included Margaret Lee Hale, Harry Johnson, Jr., Bunny Nankivell, Milnor Jones, Bill Selden,

Emmagene Mayfield, C.E. Guffey, Frank Dodson, Lem McSpadden, Sarah Louise Mayfield, Maynard Ellis, Jr., and others. The Little Theatre, with Mrs. Harold List as president, presented the play **Personal Appearance** which was sponsored by the Athens Kiwanis Club. The proceeds went for the building of a Boy Scout and Girl Scout cabin.<sup>32</sup>

Music reached the people in many forms. The Salvation Army played at the courthouse in 1931, and the American Legion Band and Tennessee Military Institute Orchestra played at Tennessee Wesleyan College in the same year as part of the Music Week activities. The local CCC boys held amateur night with singing, dancing, and mountain music at the Gem Theatre in Etowah. The musical highlight of 1934 was a program of piano music performed by Madame Leszniewska, sponsored by the Athens Music Club and held at the home of R.J. Fisher.<sup>33</sup>

Dances were popular, especially those held at the Robert E. Lee hotel. Admission was \$2.50 in 1931, but was later reduced to \$1.50. The first annual Roosevelt Ball sponsored by the "BGKs," under the leadership of Helen Lee, was held in the hotel in 1934, drew a crowd of 200, and netted 78 dollars. Proceeds went to the Warm Springs Foundation for the treatment of polio.<sup>34</sup>

<b>\$1.50</b>	<b>National</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Birthday Ball for the President</b>			
<b>TUESDAY, JAN. 30, 1934</b>			
<b>ROBERT E. LEE HOTEL</b>			
<b>ATHENS, TENNESSEE</b>			
<p>This Birthday Ball in honor of President Franklin D. Roosevelt is one of many similar affairs being held in every city and town in the United States on the occasion of his fifty-second birthday. One dollar of the amount paid by you for this ticket will be included in the Birthday Gift to be presented to the President to endow Warm Springs Foundation, so that it may carry on its nationwide work for the relief of sufferers from infantile paralysis.</p>			

**Ticket to the first Birthday Ball in honor of President Roosevelt held at the Robert E. Lee Hotel in January 1934.**

**Courtesy of Laura Fisher Brown**

Pie suppers were held in almost every community and were well attended. Proceeds went to the schools for the purchase of supplies, equipment, and books. A 1931 Clearwater PTA contest offered a large cake for the prettiest girl, a jar of pickles for the ugliest boy, and a rolling pin for the most henpecked husband.<sup>35</sup>

Games popular with families were checkers, Rook, dominoes, and Old Maid. With no money for recreation, families spent many hours together

playing games, singing, and generally having a good time. One could make a ball from a rock and wornout socks and a bat from a hickory pole. Horseshoe games, cornshuckings, square dancing, hay rides, and candy pullings cost little or nothing but provided much entertainment. Even watching the trains go by furnished some diversion. Hundreds sometimes gathered at depots to observe the arrival and departure of trains.<sup>36</sup>

Boxing and wrestling, both men's and women's, were popular sports in the thirties. Local wrestler "Bull" Kennedy was a favorite who possessed, according to one local newspaper, the quality which makes great wrestlers, "the ability to take it." In 1935, the Terrible Turk, Mike Miller, a retired former world's heavyweight champion, and "Curley" Nelson, the cowboy from Cheyenne, squared off in a match in Etowah.<sup>37</sup>

For those who sought another means of escaping from the everyday routine there was a popular concoction, consisting of one can of malt, one keg of yeast, and three pounds of sugar, which sold for \$1.03. With a few drinks of this mixture, hard times could indeed be forgotten, at least for a little while.<sup>38</sup>

Movies provided another popular diversion. The usual charge for admission was ten cents for children and 25 cents for adults. Some of the favorite screen stars of McMinn audiences during the thirties were Barbara Stanwick, John Boles, Clark Gable, Lucille Ball, Jack Oakie, Hopalong Cassidy, Fred Astaire, George Burns, Gracie Allen, and Shirley Temple. Following a nationwide trend, so popular were movies that the management of the Strand Theatre in Athens found it necessary to increase the seating capacity by 250 seats and to add air conditioning. In February, 1932, a new Athens theatre opened in the Wattenbarger Building with **Huckleberry Finn** chosen as the film for opening night. **Gone With the Wind** came to McMinn County in 1940 and played to capacity audiences.<sup>39</sup>

Theatre managers made certain that children could attend an occasional movie whether they had the admission price or not. Sometimes they were admitted free; at other times, especially during the Christmas holidays, admission was gained in exchange for a canned good or a toy to be donated to the needy.<sup>40</sup>

Jack Pot Night, held each Friday evening at the Etowah Gem Theatre, proved to be highly popular as people hoped to win a cash prize given by the management. According to Frank McKinney, people stood in a line extending for two blocks on Jack Pot Night.<sup>41</sup>

Sometimes when things got dull, creative individuals invented their own unusual entertainment. Such was the case in July, 1932. Howard Bales was working in a drugstore located in a corner of the Robert E. Lee Hotel and owned by "Bullet" Boyer. On July 30, a hail storm struck Athens, and Bales and Boyer saw an opportunity to have some fun. Boyer told Bales to chip off a hunk of ice from the 50-pound block in the icebox, and he would go up in the hotel elevator and drop it out the upstairs



window. Bales chipped off a ten to twelve-pound chunk, and Boyer, with the ice discreetly tucked under his arm, headed upstairs. Out the window it went, and luckily only a small piece broke off when it hit the street below. Athens citizens were tremendously excited for they had never seen such a large hailstone. Someone carried it into Red Chapman's Restaurant, located near Bayless Hardware Store, and put it in the icebox. All day long people streamed in and out of the restaurant to get a look at the unusual hailstone. Asa Walthall hurried into Boyer's drugstore, excitedly told the funmakers about the phenomenon, and asked to use the telephone to call Daisy Rice Spradling at **The Daily Post-Athenian**. The giant hailstone was front page news in the local newspaper, and the Associated Press was notified.

At first Bales and Boyer said nothing to anyone about their practical joke, but a week or two later, two General Electric employees who happened to be working in Athens came by the drugstore and mentioned that while they were in New York they had seen an article about Athens in the **New York Times**. "Is that right?" Bales said. "What did it say?" The men replied, "It was about a large hail stone."<sup>42</sup>

Strangely enough, McMinn County obtained a zoo as a result of the Depression. Judge Clem Jones, whose 800-acre farm was located between Athens and Niota, came into possession of several rare animals, including llamas, dry land cranes, and rare pheasants, during the early thirties. The Jones farm quickly became a popular place with local residents as well as with tourists from all over the nation who stopped by to see the strange creatures. **The Daily Post-Athenian** in January, 1932, commenting on the new attraction, stated that Judge Jones had recently purchased animals from a defunct zoological garden in Nashville. Apparently fearing criticism for extravagance, Jones denied that he purchased the animals and wanted it to be known that he was not spending money "on such things during the present condition." He said the animals were given to him when the Nashville Zoological Garden was closed for lack of patronage. A group of his friends, knowing of his large and well-equipped farm, had felt that the animals would receive good care and a good home on the farm. "It would be ridiculous," Judge Jones stated, "buying rare animals during such a time as the present. They were given to me by friends and even placed on the farm for me."<sup>43</sup>

Radio was another popular form of entertainment during the Depression. It brought the outside world to McMinn County, helped to relieve the monotony of staying at home, and brought families and neighbors together. Chores were quickly completed in the evening so that the family could gather around the radio for their favorite program or to listen to the news. Since no local radio stations existed in the 1930's, listeners tuned in to WNOX, Knoxville, WDOE, Chattanooga, WSM, Nashville, WWL, New Orleans, and WLW, Cincinnati, for their listening entertainment.

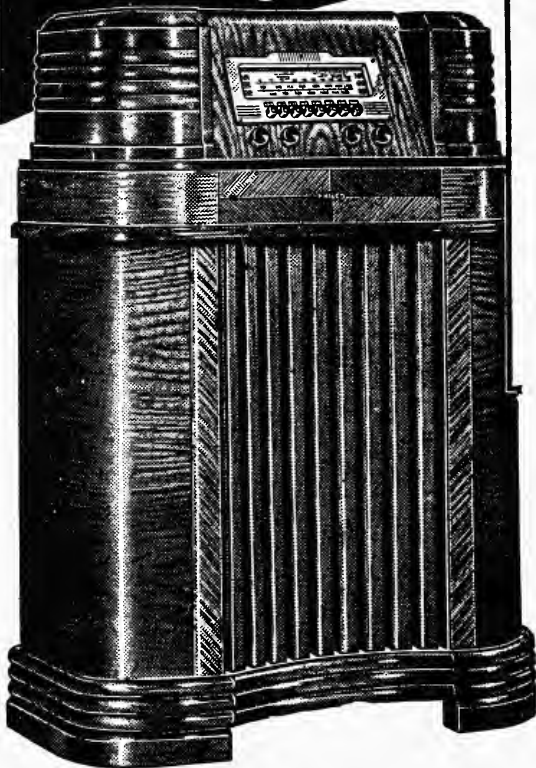
*First Showing*

**PHILCO**

**New 1940**

**Built to receive  
TELEVISION  
SOUND!**

*... with amazing*  
**BUILT-IN SUPER  
AERIAL SYSTEM**



## **ALWAYS THE LEADER**

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**Philco Was the First Ra-  
dio Agency Established in  
Athens and Down Thru  
the Years Its Lead Has  
Never Been Relinquished.  
IT'S PHILCO ....**

**First and Always!**

The radio provided a popular form of entertainment during the 1930's and helped relieve Depression "blues."

*Daily Post-Athenian, 1939*

Ownership of a radio was a source of pride and a measure of prestige. Not everyone could afford to purchase a radio which sold for from 50 to 65 dollars. Before TVA electricity, rural residents used battery-operated

radios, and the replacement of batteries was beyond the means of many families. Those who did own a radio gladly shared it with friends and neighbors. "If you had a radio, you were always assured of having company," noted Kenneth Barker, whose family was among the first in Etowah to acquire this luxury. Saturday night was a favorite time to gather at someone's home to listen to the radio, often the "Grand Ole Opry," to talk, play games, munch on peanuts, popcorn, or molasses candy, and to generally have a good time.<sup>44</sup>

The coming of TVA electricity in 1936, along with the improvement of finances, resulted in a tremendous increase in the sale of radios. According to one estimate, 90 percent of the rural subscribers had radios by 1939.<sup>45</sup>

Social activities were largely limited to the vicinity of one's home, for the Depression made transportation difficult. Few people could afford to buy a new automobile which ranged in price from \$475 to \$781. Car sales plummeted during the 1930's, and it was not until the end of the decade that sales began to show some improvement. Many who owned cars at the beginning of the Depression found it necessary to use their vehicles sparingly, usually for special occasions such as a shopping trip to town or perhaps to a funeral. "Joy riding" was too expensive for many car owners. Some, unable to afford a battery, tires, car tags, or gasoline, even at 15 to 20 cents a gallon, were forced to park their cars until times improved. In March, 1932, County Court Clerk John Anderson reported that several hundred car owners had not purchased a \$2.50 automobile license.<sup>46</sup>

Walking, riding horseback, or traveling by wagon were the chief methods of getting about for the masses. As a result, many people were unable to travel beyond McMinn County during the 1930's; those financially able to travel by car or train beyond the county line were in the minority. Individuals with money could ride the train and sleep in air-conditioned comfort for two cents per mile, and 75 cents purchased a round trip ticket from Athens to Chattanooga.<sup>47</sup>

Walking trips of several miles were not uncommon. Many rural children walked two or three miles to school, families walked to church or to the homes of friends and relatives, and boys walked to the homes of their girlfriends. Most "courting" was done at home or at church during the Depression. A young man might walk miles to attend a pie supper and to have a chance to buy his sweetheart's pie for 20 cents.

The country store provided another important social outlet for the farmer during the 1930's. Almost every rural community of any size had one within walking distance. The store took a farmer's produce such as eggs, chickens, corn and wheat; and, in return, supplied him with such necessities as salt, sugar, soda, and coal oil. Owners of stores such as the Trew Store, operated by Mortimer Trew in Dentville, and the Chris Wattenbarger Store, in the Pine Grove community, extended credit to the

		Dr.	Cr.
From book 5 P 293		1381	
1-29-1935	To. Cash Thred by Homer.	60	
1-31-1935	" Car patching	20	
2-2-1935	" Sugar vicks <sup>30</sup>	55	
2-2	" " "	110	
2-4	" By Cash		110
2-6	" To snuff warm <sup>35</sup> medicine	45	
2-7	" " Turpentine gurnine <sup>10</sup>	20	
2-9	" " Gas 110 oil 20	130	
2-11	" By Cash		130
2-11	" To Vicks	30	
2-12	" " Flour	100	
2-20	" " Kerosene candy by Sue	11	
2-27	" By bal on due bill		08
2-28	" To candy by sue	02	
3-1	" By eggs		12
3-2	" To gas	110	
3-2	" By egg by sue		03
3-3	" " Cash		110
3-5	" " Snuff and by Sue	16	
3-7	" By eggs		16
3-11	" To flour by sue	100	
3-11	" By Cash		100
3-21	" To 7 gal Gas oil 20	174	
3-27	" " bath. glass by sue	15	
3-28	" By produce		15
4-15	" To flour by sue	100	
4-16	" By Cash		100
4-18	" To bal on snuff by Sue	03	
6-6	" " Wisom <sup>55</sup> by Womers & pl	58	
6-12	" " 3 gal gas by sue	69	
6-15	" To By Cash 69		49
6-15	" By produce		55
6-22	" Balance on sugar	91	
6-21	" To lime by O. R. 20	20	
7-1	" By frys		80
7-6	" To 25 lb sugar	150	
7-11	" " 60 snuff 10 by sue	70	
7-3	" " Coffee by sue	20	
7-16	" " Coffee by sue	20	
7-25	" " Cash by wife	100	
7-29	" By cash		100
7-30	" To dress and join for thred	85	
7-30	" By chicken & butter cloth		85
7-13	" To candy by sue	04	
7-19	" " gum	02	
8-1	" " Cash for Sue school back	100	
8-3	" " Snuff by sue	10	
to P. 36		3278	923

Page from the ledger of Wattenbarger's Store, owned and operated by Mr. and Mrs. Chris Wattenbarger in the Pine Grove community during the 1930's.

Courtesy of Grace Wattenbarger

hard-pressed rural residents and thus kept many afloat who otherwise would have gone under during hard times. The country store was also a social institution where farmers met to discuss crops, livestock, politics, and religion.<sup>48</sup>

The Trew family operations included a flour mill, a cotton gin, threshing machines, a farm implement dealership, assorted hardware, and supplies of seed and fertilizer. Almost anything a farmer needed could be obtained from Trew Store.

Although money was scarce during the Depression, parents found ways to bring cheer and happiness to their children at Christmas. Many people fondly remember the candy, oranges, apples, and bananas received as children at Christmas. This was about the only time of the year that many saw such delightful treats, and even then the amounts were very limited. Toys were few, for available money went to buy a pair of shoes or some other needed article of clothing. Still, sacrifices were often made to provide some sort of plaything which would bring happiness, at least for a little while. One man, whose two children were small during the thirties, recalls riding a mule from Jones Chapel community to Etowah, a distance of seven miles, with four pounds of butter which he managed with some difficulty to sell for ten cents a pound. With 40 cents in hand, he proceeded to "buy Christmas." He purchased a few apples, oranges, and small bag of grocery-mix candy. He also bought a five-cent horn for his 5-year-old and a comb for his wife.<sup>49</sup>

Another man remembers the Christmas of 1933. There were four children in the family, and the mother was ill that year. Each of his two brothers received a five-cent sack of marbles, and he got a five-cent set of jacks on a card with a rubber ball. In addition, there were some apples, a few oranges, and a box of stick candy. The total amount spent on Christmas for the entire family that year was about two dollars.<sup>50</sup>

Hunting and trapping provided many with a means of buying something extra for Christmas. As soon as the hunting season opened, men and boys hunted or trapped rabbits and sold them for 15 or 20 cents each. Instead of cash, merchants often gave "due bills" which were saved up and used to buy Christmas gifts or other needed items. Mort Trew of Trew Store at Dentville dispensed many due bills and accepted them in exchange for candy, apples, oranges, bananas, or a Christmas toy.<sup>51</sup>

Many homes were lost as a result of the Depression. Some people lost their home due to bank foreclosure or delinquent tax sale; others were forced to sell to pay off debts. Financial desperation caused some to set fire to their home to collect the insurance. On the street Marian Cochran lived on in Englewood, all but three homeowners lost their home due to bank foreclosure. Afterwards, she said,

There was a great sale. People who had saved a little money saw an opportunity to better themselves by buying these

houses which the bank sold. They paid from \$250 to \$500. Later they hoped and did double and triple their investment.<sup>52</sup>

In January 1932, a chancery court delinquent tax sale forced 212 pieces of real estate on the auction block. When Kenneth Barker's father lost his job on the L&N Railroad, the family had to sell their home to pay debts and move into an apartment. Economic pressures later forced the family to also sell a 24-acre farm in the Goodsprings community. Reverend Burch Cooper remembered an unusual number of houses burning in Etowah. One day he asked his friend Joe Taylor, "What's happening over in Etowah?" Taylor replied, "They're burning it off; reckon they're going to sow it in oats." According to Rev. Cooper, there were some arrests and convictions and the burning came to an end. Such was the plight many property owners found themselves in as the result of hard times.<sup>53</sup>

On the other hand, home ownership was made easier for some McMinn County residents in 1934 with the establishment of the Athens Federal Savings and Loan Association. The local association grew out of congressional action which established the Home Owners' Loan Corporation, the purpose of which was to make available long-term mortgage loans. Prior to the establishment of the local association, only short-term loans could be obtained from local banks. This made it difficult, if not impossible, for many to purchase a home during the 1930's.

Under the leadership of Paul Walker, \$7,500 was raised locally, an additional \$15,000 was obtained from the HOLC, and a loan of \$18,000 was secured from the U.S. Treasury Department. With a total of \$42,500 in capital, Athens Federal Savings and Loan was ready to make loans in June, 1934.<sup>54</sup>

The establishment of the new bank introduced a new concept to the community. Families able to make a small down payment could now own a home and pay for it in installments. The new banking institution was greeted with enthusiasm by the public. During the first five years of the association's operation, approximately 600 new homes were built, and as many or more loans were made for remodeling of existing homes.<sup>55</sup>

The first home constructed by a loan from Athens Federal was on Dixon Avenue, costing \$1,700 and consisting of four rooms and a bath. The cost of constructing a modest home in the mid-thirties ranged between \$800 and \$1,200. A larger home with five rooms might require from \$1,500 to \$1,800 with the borrower owning the lot.<sup>56</sup>

The coming of TVA electricity in the 1930's revolutionized the way of life of farm families in the Tennessee Valley. Before electricity came to McMinn County in 1936, rural families led a primitive sort of home life. Cooking was done on a wood stove which in winter was cozy but in summer was equivalent to a steam bath. Baths, especially in the winter,



The Kitchen Is the One Absolute Ne-  
cessity To the Home and That  
Requires a Good Stove.  
Supply Yours With  
**BROWN'S**

**A 1939 model wood burning cook stove.**

**Daily Post-Athenian, 1939**

were taken infrequently in a galvanized wash tub in a corner of the kitchen. At some distance from the house stood the small "necessary" building with its lime box and scoop and its Sears and Roebuck catalog. In spite of lids being covered and lime being sprinkled, these little houses always held an aroma all their own, and few visitors tarried long. Cold winds whistled through the cracks in winter, and the hot sun made the privy like an oven in summer, further contributing to shortened visits.

Milk and butter were stored in a springhouse or placed in a bucket and lowered into the well to keep them cool. Water was drawn from a well or cistern or carried from a nearby spring. Heat was supplied by a fireplace or a heater. Houses and barns were lighted by mellow but dim kerosene lamps and lanterns. Eyes were severely tested while trying to read, sew,

or study in dimly-lighted homes. Laundry, a weekly chore dreaded by most women, was done in a black iron wash kettle located in the backyard. Over the next several years, electricity was to gradually change all this.

Work began on TVA lines in the western portion of McMinn County in August, 1936. On September 28, a switch was thrown in Decatur, giving electricity to some 400 rural McMinn families in the Idlewild, Riceville, and Sanford areas and ushering in a new era for farm families. Almost immediately advertisements began to appear in the farmers' section of the local newspapers illustrating how electrical kitchens, equipped with hot water heaters, ranges, and refrigerators, could eliminate much of the drudgery from farm and home.<sup>57</sup>

Switching to electricity with its attendant conveniences, however, was rather slow and gradual; some parts of the county did not receive electricity until the 1940's, and many families could not afford the price of major electrical appliances. When money was available for such conveniences, one of the first items bought was an electric radio for battery-operated radios proved to be inefficient and costly to operate. The next appliance purchase was usually a refrigerator. A 1939 TVA survey reported that 90 percent of rural families had radios, 18 percent refrigerators, 13 percent ranges, six percent water heaters, and six percent water pumps. The average electric bill in 1939 was \$2.25 per month. Low-cost electric power raised living standards and brought a better way of life to the people of McMinn County.

With the electrification of the county and with the local economy showing improvement in the late 1930's, McMinn Countians looked forward to a brighter decade ahead. Although unemployment still plagued the county and economic conditions had not yet returned to 1929 levels, most felt the worst was over and optimistically looked to the future. They could take pride that through resourcefulness, ingenuity, and hard work they had managed to weather the worst economic collapse in the country's history and through it all had maintained a spirit of optimism.

## NOTES

1. W.P. Chesnutt, Sr., letter to Bill Akins, 28 April 1983.
2. R. Frank McKinney, interview, 4 April 1983.
3. Louise Massengill, interview, 4 May 1983; Charles Morris, interview, 3 March 1983; Rex Moses, interview, 20 November 1982; Bill Selden, interview, 10 May 1983; Mattie Ralston, interview, 26 January 1983.
4. Fred Wankan, Sr., interview, 17 November 1982; Athens Daily Post-Athenian, 23 February 1932.



5. Bess Kincaid, interview, 19 March 1983; Elizabeth Kelley Wade to Bill Akins, 16 August 1983.
6. **Minutes of McMinn County Quarterly Court**, 7 October 1935.
7. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 12 April 1932; Jessie McCurdy, interview, 21 May 1983; Elisha Brient, interview, 9 April 1983; Avery Sanford, interview, 22 January 1983.
8. J. Neal Ensminger, interview, 30 April 1983; Charles Jaquish, interview, 4 July 1983; Wade letter.
9. Amy Johnson, letter to Sally Ealy, 3 February 1983.
10. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 27 February 1933; **Etowah Enterprise**, 31 July 1931.
11. McCurdy interview; Mrs. John Palmer, interview, 1 February 1983.
12. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 20 July 1933.
13. *Ibid.*, 13 March 1936.
14. Helen Swartout, interview, 18 January 1983; **Daily Post-Athenian**, 3 January 1936; Mrs. Wayne Rudder, interview, 18 January 1983.
15. Noah Boles, interview, 1 November 1982.
16. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 30 August 1932; Jay Reed, interview, 27 February 1983.
17. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 18 June 1931; Zula Campbell, interview, 18 April 1983.
18. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 24 September 1940.
19. *Ibid.*, 5 May 1933.
20. Campbell interview; **Minutes Quarterly Court**, 6 October 1930, 4 July 1932; **Daily Post-Athenian**, 5 July 1932.
21. **Marriage Records, McMinn County, 1923-40**.
22. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 2 July, 1 September 1932.
23. **Tennessee Vital Statistics**, 1920-1940, Tennessee Department of Public Health, Nashville.
24. **Etowah Enterprise**, 28 March 1930.
25. *Ibid.*, 7 November 1935.
26. Lorene Epperson, interview, 8 July 1983.
27. Arthur Akins, interview, 1 February 1983.
28. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 1 October 1933.
29. Dr. H.R. Thomas, interview, 31 January 1983.
30. *Ibid.*
31. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 8 June 1931, 6 July 1937; **Etowah Enterprise**, 20 April 1933, 5 May 1938.
32. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 30 April 1931, 2 February 1938.
33. *Ibid.*, 16 April 1934.
34. *Ibid.*, 1 February 1934.
35. *Ibid.*, 12 August 1931.
36. Ray Reed, interview, 27 February 1983; Jay Reed, interview; Jaquish interview; Gene Collins, interview, 14 August 1983.
37. **Etowah Enterprise**, 11 April 1935.

38. Ensminger interview.
39. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 11 February 1932.
40. **Ibid.**, 17 December 1931; **Etowah Enterprise**, 12 February 1932.
41. McKinney interview.
42. Howard Bales, interview, 23 February 1983.
43. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 18 January, 20 February 1932.
44. Kenneth Barker, interview, 18 November 1982.
45. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 18 September 1939.
46. Sam Reed, interview, 12 February 1983; **Daily Post-Athenian**, 29 March 1932.
47. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 3 April 1933.
48. Grace Wattenbarger, interview, 27 February 1983; Mortimer Trew, interview, 9 April 1983.
49. Akins interview.
50. James H. Owen, interview, 19 July 1983.
51. Trew interview.
52. Marian Cochran, letter to Sally Ealy, 1 March 1983.
53. **Etowah Enterprise**, 11 December 1931; Barker interview; Rev. Burch Cooper, interview, 28 April 1983.
54. Paul Walker, interview, 20 May 1983.
55. **Ibid.**
56. **Ibid.**
57. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 28 September 1936.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Depression Goes To School**

**By Sally DeWitt Ealy**

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The Depression severely tested the educational systems in McMinn County. It took a cooperative effort of the county courts, school boards, teachers, students and parents, all working together, to keep the schools open. Adversity produced the kind of community spirit that built character and fostered a determination not only to survive but to make the future better.

Although the Depression forced severe cuts in education budgets, local schools never closed during the 1930's, making them a source of community identity and pride and among the most stable institutions in the county. The Depression also brought to the community's attention leaders in education who helped keep schools operating at great personal sacrifice. Teachers and students knew actual want; they suffered severely from the lack of material things. Not only did students go to school without sufficient books and supplies, but they also went without enough food or clothing. Since teachers were able to identify families in need, they expanded their traditional role and became "social workers." Some innovations took place. Attention was given to curriculum improvement, and Cook School for black students received state recognition because of its successful programs. School boards even prepared to make the expensive transition from horse-drawn to motorized transportation for pupils.

The economic conditions under which the public school system in McMinn County labored during the Depression were similar to those in other parts of the country. When the economic crash came, income was greatly reduced and in many instances completely wiped out. Tennessee's state treasury was similarly affected so that it could no longer meet the obligation that had been made during the period of prosperity. Approving a budget was one thing; finding the money to make the payments was another.

Local units of government faced the same problem. McMinn County could not get money which had been promised by the state. Moreover, local property values declined resulting in a reduction in income from related taxes. That, along with difficulty in collecting taxes, caused a severe financial problem during the 1930's.

As a result of decreasing funds, it became necessary to reduce expenditures for all school purposes. School building construction practically ceased. Teachers' salaries were greatly reduced; and, in a majority of instances, the small salaries promised were not paid promptly. Some teachers were terminated; a few school activities were discontinued; and through consolidation, many schools were eliminated.

The McMinn County Quarterly Court struggled constantly during the 1930's to fund an adequate budget. City governments faced the same problems. By 1940 the school budget had not reached the 1929 level of funding. Never knowing how much state aid would be available or when the state could meet its obligations, they made the best decisions they could under difficult circumstances. In 1932, while considering closing schools because of past due state funds, the school board emphasized the gravity of the situation:

Because of the lost confidence in the state paying its obligations to the schools... It is indeed unusual if not entirely unprecedented in the history of Tennessee, that public confidence in the state government is so shaken and disturbed that the ability of the commonwealth to pay its obligations as created and fixed by solemn legislations enactment is officially questioned.<sup>1</sup>

Tennessee was in the depths of the Depression when Hill McAlister became governor and Franklin D. Roosevelt became president. Governor McAlister cut all state expenditures sharply including those for public education. Fortunately, McMinn County became aware of the condition two years earlier and stopped the normal increase of expenditures for education. McMinn County reduced expenditures, as McAlister asked, by more the 35% from the high mark of 1930. In spite of continued reductions in funds, members of the school board did the best they could, and by 1940 McMinn County managed to rank twelfth out of ninety-five counties in meeting standards set by the state.<sup>2</sup>

Small country schools were very common in the 1930's with a wide variation in the quality of facilities. Some of the poorer schools were

nothing more than abandoned church buildings; other schools, constructed of brick, were much better equipped. Mt. Arnon, a one-teacher school located about two miles north of Englewood, was a poor school. Col. W.W. Eledge, who graduated from Tennessee Wesleyan College and began his teaching career there, recalled:

The school was accessible only by hiking in. The building was an old abandoned church, unpainted, with few windows, making it very dark inside. It had no electricity and no bathroom facilities; boys and girls "just hit the woods in different directions." Finally, through the government sanitation program, outdoor toilets were built. The school was heated with a wood burning stove. Most of the time we cut our own wood.<sup>3</sup>

Mrs. Effie Bigham was fortunate to teach at Mouse Creek School, a two-room brick building located about five miles west of Athens, that was considered a "model school" by some. Grades 1-4 were in one room and grades 5-8 were in the other. There were wooden desks, one student to a desk. There were blackboards on the wall. This model school had electric lights by 1936 and also had the first sanitary drinking fountain in the county. The building was heated by two Warm Morning heaters purchased by the Parent-Teacher Association which also installed glass window boards for proper ventilation.<sup>4</sup>



**Mouse Creek School. Two-room school located five miles west of Athens**

**Courtesy of Effie Bigham**

Others who taught in the larger schools found less than ideal conditions. Nellie Ruth Bowers spent her first year of teaching at Union Grove and noted:

My first year was my worst year of teaching. I taught the fourth and fifth grades. My "room" was part of the auditorium with Buster Latham on the other side of the curtain with his eighth grade students. The amount of noise was certainly 90% his voice. Electric lights were not installed until 1939.<sup>5</sup>

Superintendent Will J. Swafford continually reminded the court of the need for better facilities. In August 1935 Swafford reported that fifty schools in the county were in need of improvements and that three new buildings were required as well. Things had not improved as late as 1939 when he again called attention to the deplorable situation of school facilities. To relieve overcrowding, new buildings were needed, and many schools were in desperate need of repairs, replacements, additions, new roofs, new floors, new windows, new weather-boarding, and painting. With seventy buildings to maintain, there was only \$6,000 in the budget for repairs.<sup>6</sup>

The 1930's were not a time for building and expansion but a period of retrenchment and consolidation. In 1930 there were forty-four one-teacher schools; by 1940 there were only twenty-seven. There were fourteen two-teacher schools in 1930, and that number grew to twenty-one. The number of three-or-more teacher schools dropped from twenty to seventeen. The number of high schools remained about the same. In 1930 there were six two-year high schools, and by 1940, there were five. There were no changes in the number of four-year high schools, which remained at five.<sup>7</sup>

Some building was done, however, with help from the federal government. The Works Progress Administration helped with repair work, employing both skilled and unskilled workers. Some schools had their playgrounds sodded so they no longer washed away, while others underwent painting and patch work on leaky roofs. In 1933, the Board consolidated several schools using labor and materials provided by the Civil Works Administration. One CWA project was the addition of two rooms to the Hillview School. An addition was also built at Englewood School using CWA labor.<sup>8</sup>

Even though teachers and students did the best they could with the facilities they had, the educational environment was far from ideal. However, some of the programs of the small schools have been maintained through the years, including "learning by doing," apprenticeships, group work, individualized instruction, "mainstreaming" of handicapped students, and community involvement. The facilities of the small schools were such that students had the advantage of hearing lessons of other grades. Therefore, many bright students utilizing good listening skills skipped one or two grades in the elementary schools.

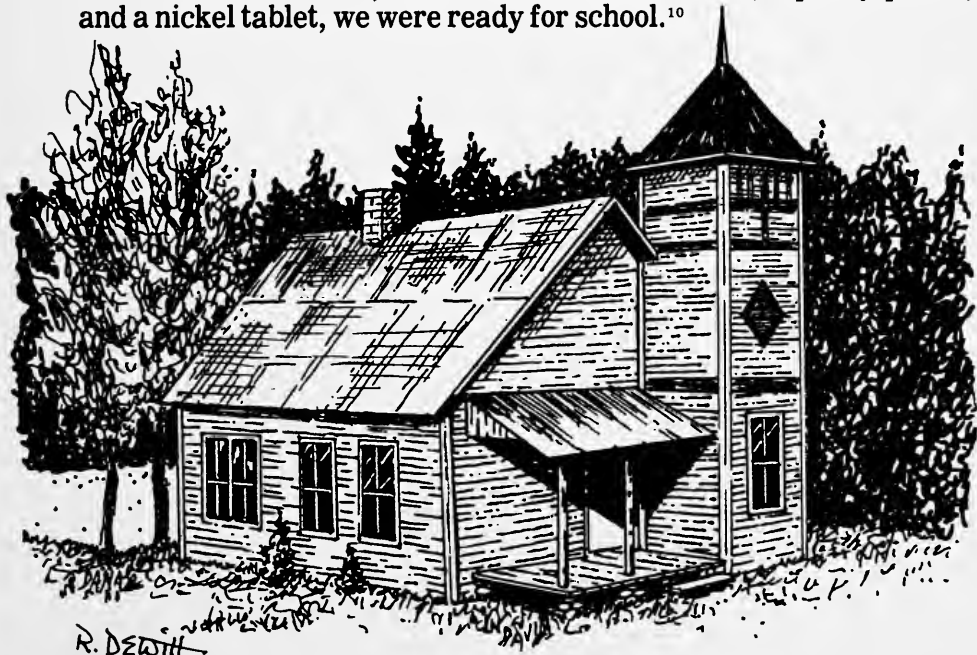
The one-room elementary schools were replaced by the consolidated graded schools. This was necessary to save money. The small community school was a great source of pride for residents, and rural people watched

with dismay as the state department of education recommended consolidation to save costs. When a community lost its school, it seemed to lose its identity. Consolidation did save money, but in many instances it meant an increase in teaching loads and overcrowded classrooms.

Despite demands for more economy in government, many people throughout the county attended county court meetings seeking increased expenditures for their particular school. Some communities did succeed in getting closed schools reopened. It seemed that everyone wanted economy in government but not at the expense of their own school. Residents from South Liberty, Hortons, Mt. Zion, and Brush Creek communities declared that the savings were more than offset by the inconvenience and hardships of the children in reaching other schools.<sup>9</sup>

Consolidation of schools for educational efficiency was useless without enough textbooks which parents were responsible for furnishing in the 1930's. Much ingenuity went into getting books and school supplies. A retired teacher, Frances Wade, writes:

Getting our school books was almost like a game. Everyone had to furnish his own. A week or two before school started we would scan the neighborhood trying to swap books. We would exchange books and try to get as many as possible for me and my brothers and sisters this way. Then, what we lacked we went to Kuhn's Store and bought secondhand. Occasionally, we got to get one new book; this was a real treat. Now, with our secondhand books, a penny pencil, and a nickel tablet, we were ready for school.<sup>10</sup>



Hortons School. One-room school located near Riceville

Drawing by R.C. DeWitt

June Stephens recalls:

Once during the school year I had completed one book, probably a reader, and was to get a new one. My parents had absolutely no money. But "where there is a will, there is a way." My dad put a sack of wheat on the back of a horse and rode to town to sell it for 50 cents a bushel to get money for my book.<sup>11</sup>

Throughout much of the 1930's students whose parents could not afford to buy books went to school without them. McMinn County owned several thousand textbooks which were loaned to students of the elementary schools, and the state furnished a limited number of books for the first three grades. The board instructed Superintendent Swafford to loan the books to the schools which had the greatest demand for them.<sup>12</sup>

Textbook changes were to take place every five years. In 1936, after obtaining permission from the state, both the McMinn County School System and the Athens City System delayed making any changes. Some books were obsolete, especially history and geography. Superintendent Swafford stated, "This is not a good time to force parents to buy books and McMinn County will be spared this extra expense this year." Earlier in 1932, Etowah parents were told by their superintendent to purchase only such books and materials as were absolutely essential.<sup>13</sup>

One of the most interesting comments regarding books came from the Athens City School Board. The board set down its policy regarding requests for purchases of books for children whose parents said they were unable to afford to buy books. Their "car rider" policy stated that when parents who were able to maintain and operate run-down cars, buy gas and oil to operate them, pay their fines for bootlegging, and buy a lot of unnecessary things, that family would get no consideration on school book purchases.<sup>14</sup>

Most parents did the best they could in the 1930's to provide their children with necessary books and supplies. However, during most of this period, teachers and students worked with insufficient supplies and teaching materials.

The school system not only helped parents to obtain the necessary books and supplies, but they also realized that parents needed many of the students to help with the farm work at home. Located in an agricultural region, McMinn County set the beginning of the elementary term to accommodate the farmers. State law required eight-month sessions for elementary schools and nine-month sessions for high schools. "The elementary schools opened in July when the crops were 'laid by,' and students went to school until the crops matured."<sup>15</sup> When harvest time came, elementary schools closed for from two weeks to a full month.

The Depression years were difficult ones for teachers also. All teachers took salary cuts in 1931-1932. Principals' salaries at McMinn County High School and Etowah High School were fixed at 10% less than in 1930-1931. Coaches at the same schools received a 10% cut in salary, and their



teaching loads were increased to seven hours per day. In July 1932 it was learned that the state planned to reduce teachers' salaries 5% to 10% below those of the last year. This applied to both elementary and high school teachers. Athletic coaches were given another 5% reduction. Some administrators volunteered cuts in their wages. Athens City School Superintendent J.C. Ridenour proposed to the City School Board that his salary be cut 10%.<sup>16</sup>

Many times their reduced salaries were not paid promptly. The **Etowah Enterprise** reported on April 18, 1930, that Etowah city teachers had not been paid for their March services. The city could not pay until property taxes were collected, and these were slow in coming in. Athens city teachers worked four months without pay in 1931. Their salaries were forthcoming when the Board of Aldermen authorized the city to borrow \$12,000.<sup>17</sup>

Average Daily Attendance in McMinn County in 1930-1931 allowed for only 150 teachers; there had been 162 the previous year. A provision was inserted into the contracts to terminate the agreement if ADA fell below 20 students per teacher.<sup>18</sup>

B.L. Hale, principal of the largest high school, stated that his salary in 1928 was approximately \$2,250 a year. He took salary cuts many times during the 1930's. Then his salary gradually started increasing. By 1943, his salary was almost back to the 1928 level.

In 1934 the following rating and salary schedule was in effect:  
Class A required a Bachelor's Degree . . . . . \$85 per month/9 months  
Class B required a four-year course . . . . . 70 per month/9 months  
Class C required four professional examinations. 60 per month/9 months  
Class D required four years of night school . . . . . 50 per month/9 months  
Class E required four years of high school or  
the equivalent. . . . . 35 per month/9 months  
An additional \$2.50 per month could be allowed for each year of experience up to a maximum of six years. No teacher was to receive over \$100 per month.<sup>19</sup>

Many times teachers were paid with "warrants" (I.O.U.'s from the county). These could not be cashed immediately because the county did not have the money. If a teacher needed money, these warrants were sold for a reduced price. Teachers referred to this practice as "discounting" or "shaving" warrants. Several merchants and some banks bought warrants, "shaved" about 15% from the full value, and held them until the county got the money. They were then in a position to make a profit.

Teachers found unique ways to receive the full value for their warrants. Jessie McCurdy, who taught at a two-teacher school, did not discount her warrants. She had friends who paid her the full price. In turn, they took the warrants and paid their county property taxes with them. Finally, the county put a stop to this because no "real money" was flowing into the county treasury.<sup>20</sup>

The most serious financial crisis came on November 3, 1931. Because of lack of money, the county school board voted to close the elementary schools at the end of four months and the high schools at the end of four and one-half months. The county was due \$115,000 from the state, but there was no money in the state treasury. The decision to close the schools resulted in a tremendous public outcry, and an appeal was made to the governor to keep the schools open. B.L. Hale, principal of McMinn County High School and president of the teachers' association, called a meeting of county teachers on Saturday, November 7, to discuss the crisis. Approximately 90% of the teachers attended and voted unanimously to continue to teach without obligation to the county for the remainder of the eight or nine months school year. Because of this commendable action by the teachers, the schools never closed during the Depression. Eventually all teachers were paid for their service although many years passed before all outstanding warrants were taken care of.<sup>21</sup>

A WPA relief program that lasted for several years helped both unemployed teachers and illiterate adults. A 1933 survey of McMinn County, conducted by unemployed teachers, reported that 1,600 residents were unable to read or write. Adult schools were set up using federal relief money, and twenty-seven unemployed teachers were hired to teach reading, writing, arithmetic, spelling, English, handicrafts, and health. The objective was to raise the standard of living of the students and the communities. By December 1933 three hundred were enrolled in twenty-seven adult schools located throughout the county with class size ranging from ten to twenty students. Students ranged from sixteen to sixty years of age. Miss Winnie Davis Neely was appointed by the state of Tennessee as supervisor of the adult schools in McMinn County. Some schools had day schedules; others had night schedules. Both men and women attended grades one through eight.<sup>22</sup>

While declining enrollments and lack of funds provided their own employment crises for teachers, one's marital status often proved crucial also. The Athens City School Board did not have a written policy regarding the marriage of teachers. However, in April 1933, three married teachers at Forrest Hill School and one at North City were replaced by single women. According to the local newspaper, the teachers were replaced only because their husbands were employed and single women needed work more.<sup>23</sup>

Mrs. Walter (Blanche) Moses, one of the dismissed teachers at Forrest Hill School, revealed that local politics played a very important part in the board's decision. A school board member's daughter had graduated from college and had been led to expect a teaching job. When applications for the following year were to be submitted, it was "suggested" that only two of the married teachers apply for the 1933-1934 school year. If they agreed to do this, the school board could hire the "board member's daughter" and two of the married teachers. The three experienced

teachers refused to be manipulated in this manner, and none were rehired. The only reason given was that they had married. In that same year the Athens City Schools ran out of money before the school year ended. These three teachers taught the last two weeks free of charge. They felt the children needed a full year of instruction.<sup>24\*</sup>

Unlike the Athens School Board, the McMinn County School Board adopted the following policy regarding their married teachers in 1937:

Any woman teacher who has married since January 1, 1937, shall not be employed during the year 1937-38; and any woman teacher marrying during her contract shall have her contract cancelled; any teacher shall not be employed for one year after her marriage.<sup>25</sup>

No record was found of any teacher being denied employment in McMinn County because of this policy, but several teachers may have delayed their marriages because of the fear of losing their jobs.

Like the teachers, students felt the impact of the Great Depression. Elementary students were more affected than the high school students. In 1933, the worst year of the hard times, elementary school enrollment dropped severely from 7,356 to 5,013 students. During that same year, the high school enrollment figures reflected a small gain in the number of students.

Absenteeism was a problem and suggests a reason for the precipitous drop in the elementary enrollment. In the fall of 1934, Truant Officer S.M. Brock reported that five-hundred children were out of school due to the lack of clothing. According to Superintendent E.R. Lingerfelt, this surpassed all previous records of its kind. Under the law, children could not be forced to attend school if parents were unable to provide suitable clothing. Government funds were not available, and the case was left in the hands of benevolent organizations and individuals. Attendance dropped again by 1938 even though by that date school attendance laws were rigidly enforced in McMinn County. An Englewood man was fined ten dollars and sentenced to eighteen days in the workhouse for failure to send his children to school.<sup>26</sup>

During the 1930's the highest elementary enrollment was 7,457 in 1931. The largest high school enrollment occurred in 1940 when 1,235 students enrolled. The drop-out rate for elementary students was significant. Also, many students ended their formal education at the eighth grade level.

The high school enrollment was steady throughout the 1930's. The hard times helped students see the true value of an education. The Depression also taught them that when jobs were available, they would go to those

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\*Mrs. Moses noted that her husband was very upset; and when asked by the chairman of the board several years later if his wife would reapply for a job, he replied, "She is still married to the same man that she married in 1932 when she was refused a job."

young people who were best educated. Therefore, many students who were unable to find jobs stayed in school.

The problems of the Depression were so great that private charities and individuals simply could not carry the load. The Red Cross took an active role in trying to solve the problems, but even this organization ran out of money. Faced with declining revenues and increasing needs, members of the community realized that it was up to them to solve their own problems. PTA units were organized throughout the county, all affiliated with the Red Cross, and they worked to get and keep students in school.

In the early 1930's most students carried their lunches in molasses buckets or in paper bags, referred to as "paper pokes." Louise Massengill remembers seeing a student who brought a lunch that consisted of okra on bread. Most of the food brought to school was whatever was available at home. The type of food that students carried to school reflected either the family's extreme poverty or their relative freedom from want if there was plenty of food at home. June Stephens remembers when the type of food offered in fast-food restaurants today, such as "homemade biscuits with ham, sausage, etc.," was so commonplace in many rural homes that it was not considered desirable:

Today a biscuit and ham is a real treat. When I was a child, such food was always available but not desirable. I longed for the bought loaf of bread and peanut butter that many of the "town" children brought for lunch. I remember one time when Mom tried to find something that I would eat for lunch and she made "rollies" - rich biscuit dough spread with real butter, sprinkled with brown sugar and cinnamon, rolled, sliced, and baked. Delicious!!! But when my lunch bag was misplaced and ended up at the teacher's desk, I was too ashamed to claim it. Later my parents bought one loaf of bread a week for my lunch.<sup>27</sup>

Col W.W. Eledge shares a similar experience:

I preferred light bread and sandwich relish. Students would trade ham and biscuits for crackers and light bread. Anything bought was a kind of status symbol, reflecting a family's ability to buy.<sup>28</sup>

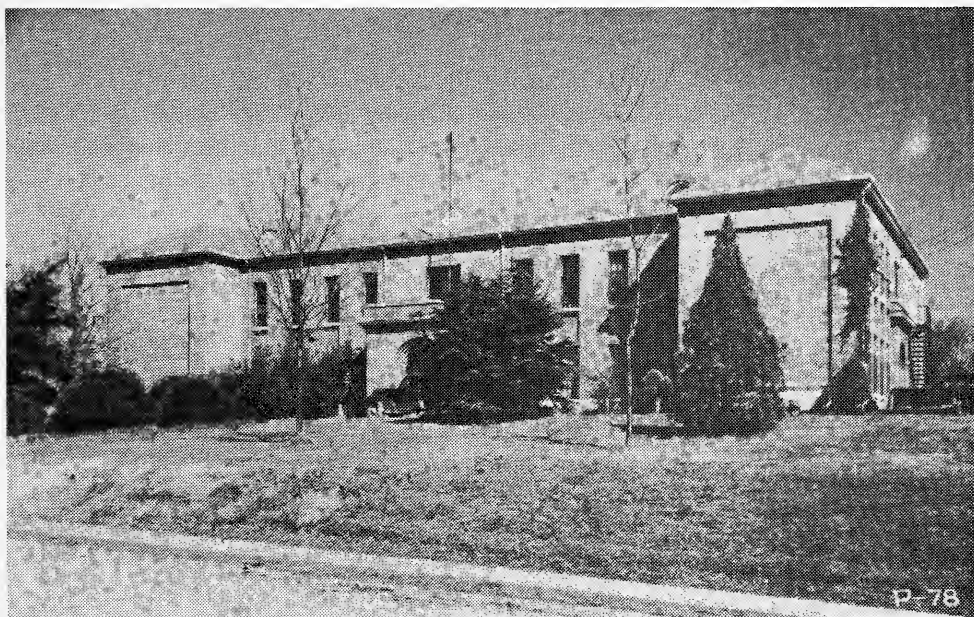
Willard Yarbrough recalls:

Students were well aware of those families who had no money. It was easy to tell at Etowah High School. Students whose fathers had jobs ate at the school cafeteria where home economics students, all girls, prepared the food. Those who did not eat there went home for lunch. Those who lived too far away skipped lunch and went hungry.<sup>29</sup>

Farmers donated bushels of vegetables. PTA ladies spent hours at many schools canning a soup mixture and took turns during the school year preparing and serving hot food to the students who did not live close enough to go home for lunch. When the government began its program of

providing surplus food (beef, evaporated milk, prunes, etc.), elementary teachers took time from their regular schedule to cook a soup mixture for the students. The menu from Monday through Friday was the same, a bowl of soup. Students contributed carrots, potatoes, onions, and meat. Ruth Miller recollected: "My sister would take a 10¢ box of crackers for her week's soup. I was older so I helped serve and wash up the bowls in exchange for my lunch."<sup>30</sup>

By late 1935 with help from the WPA, in one month's time fifteen schools had initiated free lunch programs, and Superintendent Swafford reported a notable increase in school attendance as a result of the free lunches. The WPA program operated at the following schools: Hillsvie, Idlewild, Union Grove, Niota, Riceville, Calhoun, Claxton, Clearwater, East Etowah, West Etowah, Pleasant Grove, Union, Shady Grove, Englewood, and Conasauga. Only one of these schools had a cafeteria. The WPA paid for a supervisor at each school to prepare and serve lunch. The county had to furnish the stove.<sup>31</sup>



**Etowah High School**

**Courtesy of Mrs. Bonnie Clayton**

PTAs at many schools bought the necessary equipment to have a cafeteria. Several years later, the cafeterias sold lunches at school. Kate Buckner remembered that she paid 25¢ per week for her soup, crackers, and milk at lunchtime and that her father thought that this was an outrageous price.

The PTAs were so involved in providing relief that their fundraising activities took many forms. The most popular events were "pie suppers."

Fred Wankan, a local newspaperman with a powerful public speaking voice, stayed busy on Friday and Saturday nights serving as auctioneer at pie suppers. While pie supper money was used for many good projects, the event itself was a time for much enjoyment for the participants; but Marie Milligan has a different memory:

Our big event was the annual pie supper. Once I made my pie and put it into a box elaborately wrapped with crepe paper. I put a bow of another color on top. I was so excited because I expected this tow-headed fellow that I had a crush on to buy my beautiful pie. Much to my dismay, "he" showed up but not long enough to buy my pie and eat it with me, because he brought his girlfriend from his own community with him. I was heartbroken and I always, until this day, think of that whenever we have a Friday the 13th. I wasn't as lucky as my older sister whose pie always brought the highest price because all of the boys wanted her pie. They would bid the price up as high as possible so her current "beau" would be compelled to bid-it-in.<sup>32</sup>

Other fund raising events included: box suppers, plays, and performances by noted radio personalities with the PTA sharing in a percentage of the profits. Once Roy Acuff came with his Smoky Mountain Boys.<sup>33</sup>

The PTA money raising activities proved invaluable to many schools. For example, at Mouse Creek School, the PTA was responsible for stage curtains, uniforms for the ball teams, glass window boards (the first in the county), a piano, World Book Encyclopedias, library books, two Warm Morning heaters, and also trees and shrubs to beautify the grounds.<sup>34</sup>

Clothing for needy children was one of the biggest problems tackled by the PTAs. At Forrest Hill School material was obtained and a sewing center was established to make children's clothes. Some schools set up clothes closets, whereby good used clothing was distributed to the needy.

Some farm children and those whose fathers had no jobs were especially poorly clothed. However, no apologies were made for lack of proper dress. Most boys wore overalls. One pair of shoes had to last the winter; and when shoes could no longer be resoled, youngsters went barefoot until spring. For that matter, it was a sign of virility for boys to be the first to go barefoot in early spring.

Girls living on farms wore clothes made of feed sacks that had been washed and boiled until most of the letters and pictures were faded. Sometimes clothing was made from sacks with floral design prints. Even underwear and nightgowns were made of feed sacks. Ruth Miller states, "When I graduated from McMinn County High School, I sang with the Glee Club wearing a suit made out of sugar sacks; and I was very proud of that suit."<sup>35</sup> With little cash on hand, mothers would buy gingham cloth for 10¢ a yard or 3 yards for 25¢. If they did not sew, they would hire a

seamstress to make a dress for 25¢ to 50¢. There were few patterns, and many girls went to school wearing dresses that ingenious mothers copied from the Sears, Roebuck catalogue or the latest **Progressive Farmer** magazine. People "made do" with the clothes they had. Neighbors, friends, and relatives shared "hand-me-down clothes." At times, blackberries were picked and swapped for used clothing. While all of this had a humbling effect, it also made people alert to every opportunity to fashion material into clothing. June Stephens remembers wearing one very stylish skirt:

One garment I remember being popular was a "Broomstick Skirt." Two skirt lengths of printed feed sack material were gathered on a band. The band was buttoned and the placket snapped closed. The finished skirt was washed, wrapped in gathers closely around a broom handle, and tied three or four times. We simply let the skirt dry and we had a pseudo-pleated skirt. I also remember wearing wool skirts made from men's trousers. I never wore jeans; but when I was small, I wore long-sleeved and long-legged knit underwear.<sup>36</sup>

Individuals did what they could to help clothe needy children. One of the most enduring programs was started by John Astor Bloom of Englewood. Col. W.W. Elledge and John Middleton explain:

Mr. Bloom, a bachelor who knew how to invest money, cared about the children of Englewood. He perpetuated his family name in a positive way and helped clothe thousands of children. He left specific instructions in his will. The Bloom Fund was to be used for the benefit of the worthy, helpless, destitute, poor children of the vicinity of Englewood. In 1982 approximately one-hundred-forty needy children of the Englewood area received clothing.<sup>37</sup>

Shoes were always in demand, and there never seemed to be enough to supply the need. In 1936 there were six-hundred children out of school chiefly due to the lack of shoes. Superintendent Swafford reported that some teachers said there were students who had come barefooted to school until Christmas.

Prompt action by Superintendent Swafford led to the gift of four-thousand pairs of shoes. A firm in Jellico, Tennessee, bought out a wholesale shoe house which had thousands of pairs of shoes in stock. The new company was willing to give away shoes to the needy if transportation cost was paid. Swafford immediately sent a truck to Jellico. Forty schools received a share of the shoes for distribution. Most of the shoes were old styles, but serviceable to many children and women who had not been accustomed to the latest styles.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to providing shoes, clothing, books, and noon day meals, the Forrest Hill PTA also conducted personal inspections of children to make sure their bodies were clean. For \$15, the PTA installed a shower in the basement of the school for those students who did not have facilities and

who did not take baths at home.<sup>39</sup> There were outbreaks of lice and itch at Forrest Hill School and probably at many other schools. Many doctors and dentists donated their services to school children by giving typhoid and diphtheria shots.

By 1940 the Kiwanis Club of Athens was directing a Blue Ribbon Health Program for the elementary children sponsored by the Tennessee Department of Health. The club donated several prizes to those who complied with the following stipulations:

1. Take the examination given by the McMinn County Health Unit, have no correctable faults, and meet immunization standards.
2. Make satisfactory progress in school work and school discipline.
3. Be cooperative in the practice of prescribed health habits.

Prizes were awarded to schools having the highest scores. The county health doctor and nurse went to the schools to make the check-ups.<sup>40</sup>

Christmastime was always a highlight of the school year but often teachers had to be especially attentive to insure the happiness of their students. Charlie Morris never forgot the kindness of one of his teachers:

I was attending Forrest Hill School and eating free in the cafeteria. At home I knew to expect little at Christmas. I was however, looking forward to drawing names at school. One Christmas, a girl drew my name; unfortunately, she was poorer than I was. I got a penny pencil - a red cedar pencil with an eraser on top. I was so disappointed that I cried. My teacher, Catherine Sadler, had a small rubber ball in her desk which she gave to me. It made me very happy.<sup>41</sup>

In spite of the difficult economic times, school life went on. The sameness of everyday life was broken up by some of the usual things that occur in schools during most any times. Talkative girls had to be separated; boys wanted to make extra money whenever they could; and homework had to be done. James Burris writes in the **Mouse Creek Directory**:

My first year at Mouse Creek was in 1935. I was in the sixth grade, and Mrs. Effie Bigham was my teacher. Everything went well with me until the next year when she decided to move my seat between two of the giggliest girls in school to separate them and keep them quiet. That part worked, but what she didn't know was that they passed notes to and from each other. I passed so many notes that year that I believe this was the reason I later went to work in the U.S. Postal Service. Those two girls were Velma Lee Shell and Mildred Johnson. Mildred made such an impression on me that she later became my wife.<sup>42</sup>

Niota School was located next to a golf course. Boys wanting to earn 50¢ by caddying on Wednesday afternoon would cut school to do so. Paul



Walker remembered the principal, J. Will Foster, asking the golfers to cooperate by not hiring students. When a student was hired, the principal would be waiting at the eighth hole, located near the school, to return the boys to their classes.<sup>43</sup>

Homework was assigned, then as now, and had to be done. When the power board cut off service for non—payment of the bill, the light of oil lamps was used. Some studied close to fireplaces; others studied late at night in cold bedrooms.

The elementary school curriculum continued to stress the three R's - reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic along with spelling, geography, history, health, and handwriting. For those students fortunate enough to continue their education in high school, they found additions to the traditional curriculum during the 1930's. In 1930-1931 the four-year county high schools were offering English, math, arithmetic, solid geometry, ancient history, medieval and modern history, American history, economics, civics, Latin I, Caesar, Cicero, French I and II, Spanish I, chemistry, physics, physical geography, geography, agriculture I and II, and home economics I and II. A successful commercial department offering typing, shorthand, and bookkeeping was added at McMinn County High School with Fred Puett as the teacher. One student, Margaret Lee Hale McKenzie, placed third in a national contest in the third year of the program's existence.<sup>44</sup>

On June 17, 1935, Will J. Swafford, newly elected McMinn County School Superintendent, announced a new program to upgrade education. He planned to set up a system to standardize the elementary schools. Eighty-one % of the students were enrolled in the elementary schools and they had no set standards. Standards were in effect in the high schools where 19% of the students were enrolled. He planned to set up a new system of keeping student records. A study of each student's environment was to be made, and a thorough system of student transfer was to be put into effect. A careful record was to be kept of every student, both in elementary and high school. With the help of PTAs, special attention was to be given to the large number of children who were out of school because of the lack of clothing and food. He also planned to organize a "teachers' council," representing teachers from all over the county, to make a personal survey of the entire school system and to continue the testing program begun three years earlier. In addition, he planned to put libraries in each school and to increase the number of volumes in the libraries already in existence.<sup>45</sup>

Much emphasis was put upon upgrading the library facilities. By 1936 Swafford reported that county schools, led by the PTAs, had raised money to buy books and that the State Department of Education had given \$250 to match the county fund. By 1940 libraries had been established in every school and more than 18,000 books had been purchased. Trained librarians were employed for all four-year high schools,

and a circulating library had been established throughout the entire school system. McMinn County teachers, students, and the communities raised more than \$10,500 for school purposes, almost all of which was used for library books. During only one year did the county court contribute money for the library fund.<sup>46</sup>

Three things came out of the 1930's: the expanded high school curriculum, the transition from horse-drawn wagons and trucks to steel school buses, and an expanded sports program. Sports provided some escape from the realities of the Depression. "Making do" with the existing facilities helped to incorporate sports into the regular curriculum. Later in the 1930's government programs helped by leveling football fields at some schools and by building gymnasiums at McMinn and Etowah High Schools. Those same football fields are in use today.

In the elementary schools, basketball was played on outdoor dirt courts. Softball was played when weather permitted. On the playgrounds students played volleyball and horseshoes, and jumped the rope. In the larger schools, younger students played in one area and older students played in a different area. Some schools had their own tournaments where younger students took great delight in competing with students from a higher grade. Also, there was competition between the individual elementary schools. Often the PTA would buy basketball uniforms using some of their "pie supper money." Occasionally, the elementary schools would get to play in Tennessee Wesleyan's gym.

"Making do" sometimes meant making your own "gym." Col. W.W. Elledge was determined to teach the students at Mt. Vernon the game of basketball. He bought the basketball and then made a "gym" using one of the rooms of the former church building that served as their school. The goal could not be installed at regulation height because the ceiling was too low. Both boys and girls made up the team. They played other one-and two-teacher schools. Since the students succeeded so well in learning the game, during the next year three of the girls made the first team at Englewood High School.<sup>47</sup>

Football became an extremely popular game in the high schools. With good level fields all that was needed was to recruit boys to play the game. Marian Cochran writes:

Football started in Englewood during the 1930's and seemed to pull the town together. We got a new principal, Mr. Homer Laws, who introduced the game to our town. Somehow equipment was obtained. Mr. Laws imported some big boys from Middle Tennessee who knew football and helped the locals learn the game. Also, many older dropouts returned to school, furthering their education and bolstering the team. Everyone was excited about this new sport and supported the team.<sup>48</sup>

Col. W.W. Elledge adds:

The WPA hired men to work on the field using wheelbarrows,

shovels, and picks. Reed Bowers wanted to play football at Englewood, so he walked six miles to and from school. Many unemployed men came back to school because, in the early 1930's, there were no age limits set for the playing of football or basketball.<sup>49</sup>

One of the most innovative schools was headed by Professor B.L. Hale. In the early 1930's McMinn County High School had no gymnasium; and the football field, which was not fenced, sloped to one side. However, this did not dampen enthusiasm when planning an athletic program.

Football started at McMinn County High School in 1927 with a Mr. Holland as the first coach. He was followed by "Gobo" Cartwright who coached during the depth of the Depression and until the spring of 1935. His players had to furnish their own equipment. They put cleats on their own shoes and wore no headgear. William P. Willson was employed in the fall of 1935 with the understanding that football would be incorporated into the regular school program. Frank Ditmore followed him as coach. Willson faced the problem of leveling the field. When he got together enough money to buy gasoline, a county employee came with the county road grader and graded the field free of charge. Willson also solicited enough money from sports enthusiasts in town to buy the necessary materials to install thirty-two lights at the field (The field now has one-hundred-fifty lights). With typical community spirit, the power company responded by installing the lights free of charge.<sup>50</sup>

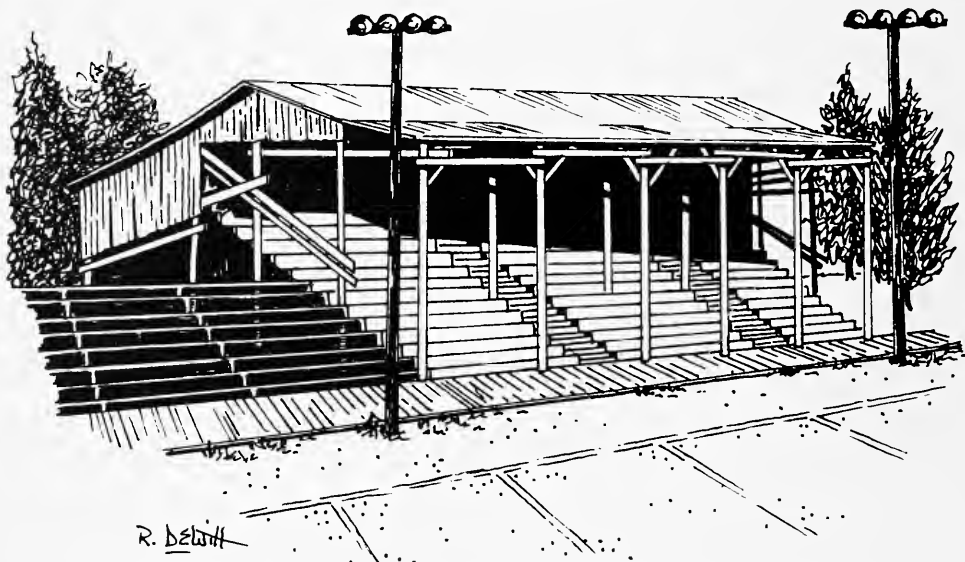


1936 McMinn County High School Football Team

Courtesy of Thomas Mayfield

Admission to football games was fifty cents. Since there was no fence, Professor Hale allowed cars to be parked around the field. He then placed students holding flags about twenty feet apart. If someone came in without paying, the student waved the flag and deputies came and collected the money.<sup>51</sup>

There were no seats at the football field. Thomas Mayfield, a McMinn County High School football player of the mid 1930's states, "The Tennessee Jersey Cattle Club helped build the original stadium at the field." To further their common interest, an alliance was formed between the Cattle Club and the high school athletic department. One needed a show barn for cattle; the other needed a grandstand and bleachers. Agreement was made to build the stock barn at the field. Seats were installed underneath the roof of the barn and cattle stalls were built underneath the seats. Consequently, McMinn County High School was one of the first schools located between Knoxville and Chattanooga that had a covered stadium and a lighted field. The WPA sodded the field in 1938. Later, in March of 1940, the school board deeded a certain portion of the athletic field for the purpose of the WPA's erecting an armory.<sup>52</sup>



**Barn - Original Stadium at the McMinn County High School Football Field**

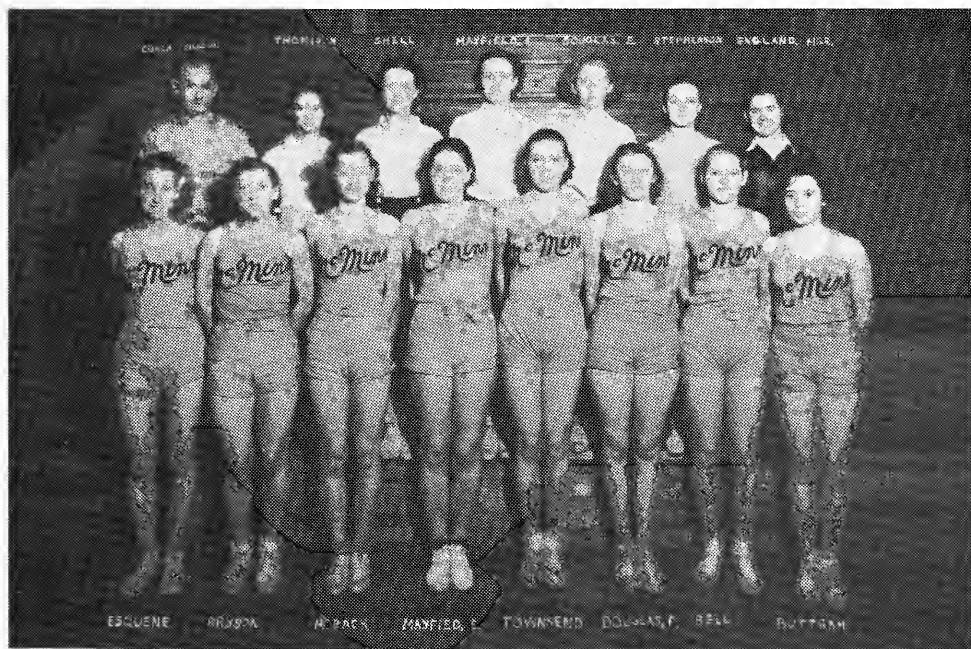
**Drawing by R.C. DeWitt**

Basketball presented a different problem. Practice was held on the dirt court at the high school. Games were played downtown on the second floor of Horton's Drug Store where a player could bank a shot off the ceiling into the basketball goal. Frank Willson recalls:

This big open room at the drug store was used for many things, among them as the National Guard Armory. My strict father would

not let me attend the high school basketball games since he referred to the room as "the Hell hole" because public dances were sometimes held there.<sup>53</sup>

Professor Hale made an agreement with Tennessee Wesleyan College whereby the high school could use the college gym by paying the light bill. However, there was only one meter at the gym and someone had to figure exactly what was owed. Professor Hale asked the high school physics class to take care of the business end of this arrangement. They counted the light bulbs in the gym, checked the wattage, kept up with the exact practice and game times, checked with power company on rates, and figured the bill. This satisfactory arrangement lasted for two or three years.<sup>54</sup>



1936-1937 McMinn County High School Girls Basketball Team

Courtesy of William P. Willson

Excitement could hardly be contained when the following item appeared in the **Etowah Enterprise** on August 22, 1935:

An extensive school building program is planned for McMinn County with expenditure of \$100,000. A Public Works Administration loan is \$55,000 is being secured with a bond issue, plus a \$45,000 additional gift from the government. Superintendent Swafford has outlined the following building program: McMinn County High School and Etowah High School each will construct gymnasiums, two additional classrooms, and equipment at the cost of \$25,000 for each school.<sup>55</sup>

William P. Willson also coached basketball at McMinn. When the new gym was completed, he personally painted the lines on the floor, and again asked the community for donations for the backboards and basketball goals.

In addition to sports, every other opportunity was taken to add enrichment to the curriculum. A thirty minute daily chapel program was used for many purposes. Since few schools had intercommunication systems, this assembly period was used for announcements or policy directives. Students marched into the auditorium and were seated by grades. Chapel was always opened with the reading of scripture and prayer by teachers or students. Music was considered very important. Song books were distributed and group singing was enjoyed. Many Depression students remember learning such old songs as "Dixie," "Billy Boy," and "Onward Christian Soldiers." Skillful pianists had an opportunity to perform. Programs were given by various grades; and during football season, pep rallies were held.<sup>56</sup>

Schools that had special musical groups gave freely of their time. When a visiting school gave a special program, chapel was extended to an hour. June Stephens writes:

At Niota, there was special excitement when Miss Carolyn Hornsby brought the Glee Club from McMinn County High School. We enjoyed hearing them sing, and we knew that she was to become the wife of our principal, J. Will Foster. Ruth Miller, a member of that group, told of the excitement of giving musical programs at many county schools. Once, the group traveled to Knoxville and sang on the radio.<sup>57</sup>

The Cook High Chorus always sang to appreciative audiences, and high school bands were in much demand. The Etowah High School Band gave at least two programs a year at Englewood.

Chapel speakers came from many vocations, ranging all the way from local ministers to, on one occasion, the governor of Tennessee. Good manners and right conduct were dwelt upon. These speakers inspired students to greater heights and challenged them to strive for better lives.

Community volunteers were used to add quality to the curriculum. Talented people gave freely of their time. One such person was Elizabeth Brient of Englewood. She was educated in music and agreed to help with music programs at the school. Later she was named "the most outstanding lady in Texas" for the type of music program that she began at Englewood. Plays and operettas were part of education and helped satisfy a hunger for entertainment and enrichment.<sup>58</sup>

Much emphasis was placed upon end of the year programs. Col. W.W. Eledge remembered the superintendent giving \$1.00 awards to students having perfect attendance. June Stephens recalls:

The school programs at the close of the school year were special events. A lot of effort was put into class plays, class nights, and

graduation exercises for both the eighth grade graduates and those completing the second year of high school. Later when more pupils continued on to the four-year high schools, less emphasis was placed on these graduations in order not to give the impression that school life was finished.<sup>59</sup>

Every effort was made to obtain inspiring speakers for the graduation exercises at the four-year high schools. Willard Yarbrough remembers:

Our teachers and guest speakers inspired us to greater heights in time of real depression, giving us faith and hope for the future. I remember one high school talk by the president of McCallie School in Chattanooga. This scholarly man from a private school knew how to instill confidence in graduating students at Etowah High School, predecessor of McMinn Central High School. His words were unforgettable:

“Hitch your wagon to a star,  
Hang on, and there you are!”

So the wagon might not make it all the way to the star; but if one fell somewhat short, the person still was successful in life and career.<sup>60</sup>



**Eighth Grade Graduating Class Forest Hill School, 1935**

Courtesy W.R. Selden

**First Row, left to right:** Kenneth McCraw, Frances Ewing, W.R. Selden, Edith Cagle, Maynard (“Brodie”) Ellis, Jr., Jean Douglas, J.W. Ray, Helen Laycock, Carl Anderson, Ozelle Shoemaker, Merril Smith, Edna Stalcup, Jim McSpadden.

**Second Row:** James (“Red”) Moses, Miss Beulah Powell (Teacher), Emma Sue Owens, Bobby Benton, Edythe Watson, Haskell Vaughn, Marjorie (“Dutch”) Taylor, Ray Gregory, Tommy Irons, Martha Epperson, Charles Mahery, Virginia Thomison, John Shipley, Ena Edgemon, Corliss Buchanan, Miss Lena Lee (Teacher).

**Third Row:** Wade Giles, Naoma Ray, Roy Allen, Viola Davis, Ely Webb, Viola Cranfill Thurston Thompson, Dorothy Powers, Glenn Toomey, Bill Hamby, Elizabeth Harris, Lush Martin, Emmagene Mayfield, Edward Cochran.

**Fourth Row:** J.C. Ridenour, Principal.



Although the schools of McMinn County during the Great Depression did not guarantee a successful life for everyone who attended them, they were probably the most stable institutions in the county during the hard times. They were a source of identity and pride and, along with the local churches, served as the glue that held the community together. Had it not been for this cooperative community spirit, the educational system could not have functioned. Too much praise cannot be given to the PTA and the various relief agencies for the work they did in providing the necessities of life for the underprivileged during those difficult years. Rural people, steeped in the American values of self-reliance, hard work, and thrift, helped the schools not only to endure but to succeed.

Willard Yarbrough summarizes the feeling shared by many students of the Great Depression. He states:

The discipline and adversities in the time of the Great Depression were blessings in disguise – lessons that taught us character and made us resolve to make our lives richer and the world a better place in which to live.<sup>61</sup>

### Black Schools

Typical of the times, the white and black school systems were completely separated. However, McMinn County's black students were more fortunate than those in the surrounding counties because they had Professor W.E. Nash. Shut out of the white schools at a time when barriers between the races prevailed, blacks in McMinn County created an excellent school system of their own. The man most responsible for this was the principal of J.L. Cook High School, Professor W.E. Nash, a wise, soft-spoken educator. His name is synonymous with black education, and through his accomplishments an entire historical era can be presented.

When Professor Nash moved to Athens in 1921, most black students went to one school which was sponsored by the Board of Missions of the United Presbyterian Church with headquarters in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Blacks attended small schools in a few of the black churches in the area. In 1925, however, the one school building was destroyed by fire; and the United Presbyterian Board discontinued all aid. The city of Athens and McMinn County then assumed all responsibility for the educational program of its black citizens.

Cooperation between city and county was a major factor in the development of Cook High School, the "flagship" black school of McMinn County, from a small elementary school to an accredited high school in a very few years. Professor Nash's ambition was to prepare students to enter college without an entrance examination. With budget cuts during the Depression, the black schools were not the first priority for school dollars. This fact never discouraged Professor Nash in his drive to educate his students. When something was needed he would consult with



nine of the seventeen county court members and get their approval before bringing the matter up in a meeting. When there was ample county money, Professor Nash would get his share; but when funds were short, the black educator had to work harder for a portion of the funds.<sup>62</sup>



**Professor W.E. Nash in the 1930's**

**Courtesy of Professor W.E. Nash**

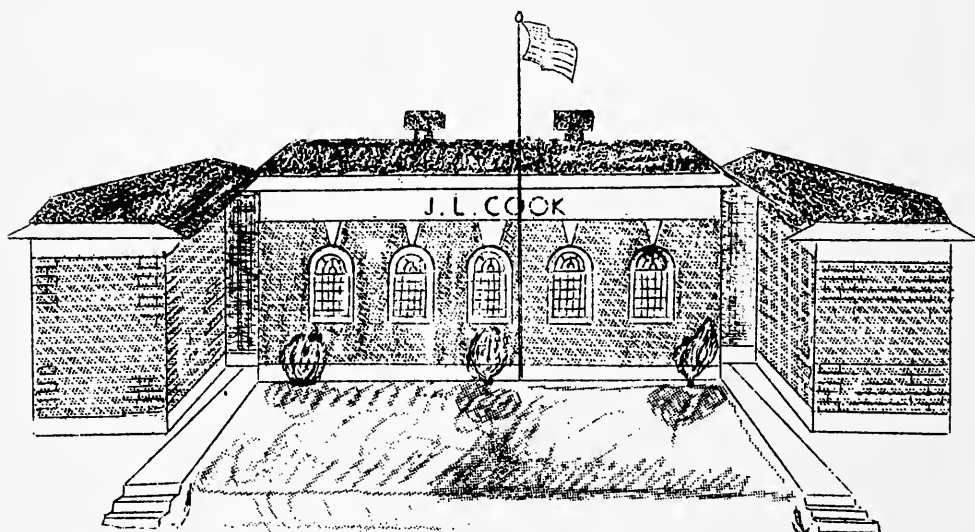
Nationally prominent organizations such as the Julius Rosenwald Fund, Jeanes Fund, and Smith-Hughes Fund came to the aid of the McMinn County Schools.\* In 1926 the Rosenwald Fund provided \$1,500 toward the total estimated cost of \$20,000 for the construction of J.L. Cook High School. In addition, this organization also helped construct buildings in East Etowah, West Etowah, and Britton. The Jeanes Fund and the Smith-Hughes Fund also supplemented finances for black schools, but the Rosenwald Fund was the most active in McMinn County.<sup>63</sup>

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\*The Rosenwald Fund was chartered by a Sears, Roebuck, and Company executive who had amassed a fortune. Its principal achievement

Cook School began in a six-room building with six teachers appointed to serve 150 students in grades one through nine. Three of the six teachers had college degrees, two others had completed two years of college, and one had a permit. In addition to the academic subjects, Cook had a home economics department and a manual arts department for which tools were purchased through the Rosenwald Fund. Extra-curricular activities included football, basketball, baseball, track, Hi-Y, Boy Scouts, and music.<sup>64</sup>

Four students graduated from the ninth grade the first year, and the county hired all four to teach in its elementary schools. Each year a grade was added to Cook until there were twelve grades. Cook's graduates supplied the majority of teachers for black public schools in the county.



**J.L. Cook High School, Grades 1-12**

**Courtesy of Professor W.E. Nash**

was the building of more than five-thousand black schools in the rural South. The Jeanes Fund was part of the Southern Education Foundation that worked to improve the educational conditions for blacks in the southern United States. The Smith-Hughes Fund provided federal funds for vocational education. Payments were used for training in agriculture, in home economics, and in trades and industries.

The city and county signed a contract in which the city paid the salaries of all the elementary teachers and one-half of the general expenses at Cook. The county paid the high school teachers and one-half of the general expenses at Cook. Cook had no hard and fast rules about residency of students and, as a result, many students came from outside McMinn County. In its long history, Cook served students from Meigs, Monroe, and Loudon counties, as well as from the Charleston area of Bradley County. A few students came from as far away as North Carolina and boarded at the school.<sup>65</sup>

By the late 1930's the black population in the rural communities had become so small that the schools in the Rocky Mount, Beth Salem, New Salem, Mount Harmony, Riceville, Britton, and Brush Creek communities were discontinued and students were transported to Athens and Etowah. The 1930's were a time of consolidation. This reduced the number of one-teacher schools from nine to six; the number of two-teacher schools remained the same; and the number of three-teacher schools was cut in half.<sup>66</sup>



**First Bus Transporting Students to Cook School-1929-Truck Owned by Prince Arnold**  
Courtesy of Professor W.E. Nash

Enrollment in Athens at Cook School increased significantly. In order to double the size of the Cook campus, two lots adjoining the property were bought in 1931 with the city paying two-thirds of the cost and the

county paying one-third. Later Professor Nash wanted to add two rooms at a cost estimated at \$10,000. The city and county agreed to pay \$2,500 each. Professor Nash sought a WPA grant for the remaining \$5,000 but was turned down. Some time later he was told confidentially that he did not ask for enough money, that he would have received the money if he had asked for as much as \$10,000. Professor Nash's approach to solving problems was unique. He went to Mr. Hugh Hoback who owned a planing mill and asked what he would charge to build the two rooms. Mr. Hoback understood that Professor Nash only had \$5,000 and he generously built the two rooms for exactly \$5,000. At a later time, the government did help at Cook; the WPA leveled the football practice field, and, in 1939, the WPA helped paint the inside of the building.<sup>67</sup>

Ambitious students with "nothing to do" went to school because there were no jobs available. By 1932 there were 375 Cook students in grades one through twelve. This was the highest enrollment in Cook's long history. Older students who had been out of school for a number of years took advantage of the opportunity to get a high school education.<sup>68</sup>

A dormitory "batching program" was started for twenty-four rural students who were lodged in buildings located close to the school. One teacher agreed to supervise the girls' building, and the janitor moved into the boys' building. Students brought their own food and cooked for themselves. Professor Nash bought iron beds for \$2.00 each and obtained springs and mattresses, but students furnished their own bed covers.<sup>69</sup>

Professor Nash knew about busing long before the Federal court ruling of the 1960's. Tennessee had an attendance law stating that a student would be in school until he or she reached a certain age.

Professor Nash asked how this could be enforced if the students could not get to school. Therefore in 1931, McMinn County purchased the county's first bus. The Rosenwald Fund helped with the operation of the bus program for many years: \$500 the first year, \$300 the second, and finally \$200. This arrangement gave the county time to make provisions for transporting these students. Elementary students living outside the city limits could attend Cook free of charge as long as they were transported to the school. The city never questioned where the students lived.<sup>70</sup>

A "cafeteria" at Cook High School was staffed by the teachers and students of the home economics department who cooked surplus food provided by the government. Some of the students brought sack lunches. Everyone ate in this "cafeteria" after carefully covering the sewing machines.

Clothing for needy children was one of the biggest problems during and after the Depression. Used clothing came from various sources. Some of the most dedicated contributors of clothing lived out of state. A few years after the Depression a white woman from New York, Mrs. Rose Vincent Trotta, visited Athens. Her daughter, Maria Trotta, shares her story:

Mother was visiting me as I was a student at Tennessee Wesleyan College. She met my housemother who invited her to a recital at J.L. Cook High School in Athens. Mother accepted and met Mrs. Willie Nash. Mrs. Nash, wife of Professor Nash, told Mother of the need to help, in any way, the children of the community and when Mother returned home she, in turn, told family and friends.<sup>71</sup>

Little did Mrs. Nash realize how sincere the New Yorker's interest was. Beginning in the 1940's and continuing to 1974, Mrs. Trotta and her sisters, Mrs. Alfred Esposito and Mrs. Anna Friscia, and Mrs. Y.J. Villani, a friend of Mrs. Friscia, sent the Nashes thousands of dollars worth of new and used clothing to be distributed in the black community. For almost thirty years, three or four big boxes arrived each year. To express their gratitude to the Nashes for distributing the clothes, the New Yorkers always included a personal gift for the couple at Christmastime. Maria Trotta told of one of the more interesting sources of the clothes:

After graduating from Tennessee Wesleyan, I lived in Georgia for several years and then returned home to New York. I obtained a position with Rockefeller Center, Inc. as their receptionist, and now in 1983, I am an executive secretary. We had a guided tour office that gave tours of the Center to people who came to New York on vacations and also to anyone who was interested in seeing Rockefeller Center. The guides wore uniforms. In the summer they wore light weight beige two piece outfits and in the winter they wore heavy suits with even heavier overcoats. A decision was made to change the color and the outfits. When I learned of this I asked if I could have the old outfits and explained why I wanted them. I was immediately given permission if the Rockefeller Center logo was taken off the sleeves. My company even made available transportation to get all of these uniforms to my home. I remember Mother and I, in the backyard, snipping off the patches and for days after the birds swooping down, picking up the threads and I am sure, making nests out of them.<sup>72</sup>

During its entire existence, Cook High was an "employment agency" operated by Professor Nash. The Tennessee Valley Authority had a program of cleaning up the Tennessee River from Watts Bar to Hales Bar, and men could work for the WPA for 30 cents an hour. In order for a black to be employed, he had to pass an examination administered by Professor Nash. Before long so many wanted to take the exam that Saturday sessions were set up. Professor Nash always administered the exams fairly, but once he had two men with large families who were in great need. Although they had difficulty with the exam, the professor saw to it that the two men passed and got WPA jobs. He even provided food for their families until they received their pay from the WPA.<sup>73</sup>

The Executive Editor of *The Daily Post-Athenian*, Neal Ensminger, commented on a milestone in education that began with Professor Nash's

“idea.”

To the best of my knowledge, Professor Nash began the first on-the-job training program in the state of Tennessee. This type of training in education has now become a major tenet in the field of education.<sup>74</sup>

Professor Nash went to the white missionary women's meetings at the local churches and talked with the members about taking a girl into their homes and giving her proper training in making beds, taking care of linens, washing and pressing clothes, cleaning rooms, and maintaining the kitchen in a manner that would please any good housekeeper. The church ladies responded and trained these girls. They were under no obligation to pay the girls anything during the training period, but all of the ladies paid them more than the girls would have charged. Consequently these girls were able to work and help their families while they were attending school.

Before long, people throughout Tennessee learned of this successful program. Mr. T.D. Upshaw, principal of Booker T. Washington High School in Memphis, used this idea in completing his research for his Master's Degree. President W.J. Hale, president of Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial College, visited Cook School to observe the program and asked Miss Christine Alexander, the home economics teacher, to come and instigate a similar program in his college. Mr. W.E. Turner, supervisor of the Tennessee black schools, observed her work there and asked her to introduce this idea throughout Tennessee. She served in that capacity for many years traveling many miles to acquaint other counties with this successful program.<sup>75</sup>

Cook High School excelled in athletics. In a letter to the local newspaper, Professor Nash shared his memories of the state basketball tournament of 1933:

...J.L. Cook High School of Athens eliminated Booker T. Washington High School of Memphis in the first game of the state tournament and went on to win second place in the state in 1933.

Cook High had only eight players at the tournament, while Booker T. Washington had 25. It was considered one of the greatest upsets of the basketball season. Cook School was only seven years old and Booker T. Washington was 40 years old. Cook had 50 students in its high school; Booker T. had 1,500. Cook had no basketball coach and Booker T. had two or three coaches. Booker T. was considered to be the best team in the state and had won the tournament several years straight. Therefore, we feel those making out the schedule placed Cook against Booker T. to eliminate Cook at the beginning of the tournament, but we surprised them all.

You may want to know how we did it. Well, we arrived in Nashville about 1:00 p.m. the first day of the tournament. After being assigned rooms, the team showered and went to bed. Around 5:00 p.m. they

were asked what they would like for dinner, and one player answered. "bologna." The other players agreed on bologna. On our way to pick up their dinner we met Coach Dobbys of Kingsport who had been the athletic director at Tennessee State University, and we asked him should we give the team bologna as we did not know how to feed athletes. Coach Dobbys said, "No bologna." He asked who were we to play that night, and we told him Booker T. Washington of Memphis. He said, "Give them anything they want because you don't have a chance." So we went on and ordered bologna.

For the rest of the day, our team rested until game time around 8:00 p.m. We came on the floor to play Booker T. - no cheers. Booker T. came on the floor with big, big cheers. Booker T. made a basket - big cheers; we made a basket - a weak cheer. At halftime we were ahead and then we began to pick up a few more cheers. We won and eliminated Booker T. Washington. We then eliminated Centerville. Next we played Coach Dobbys's Kingsport team. We eliminated Kingsport, and then came the championship game with Lebanon. Our team was rested and ready to go with Melvin Matlock, Sewell Ward, William Queener, Ulyseus Queener, Ed Cansler, Ump Cansler, Henry Moss, and James Cates. They played like the champs they were.

We were two points ahead when William Queener burst one of his tennis shoes in the last quarter. We had to take him out and put in a "sub." Lebanon then made baskets beating us by two points. We got second place and James Cates was high scorer of the game and was selected All State and All Southern forward. We attribute our success very largely to staying in our rooms and being well rested for each game.<sup>76</sup>

One of Cook's students, Mrs. Amy D. Johnson, shared her remembrances of school life during the 1930's:

...I attended J.L. Cook High School. I had three friends who lived in Riceville about six miles from Athens. There were times when they missed their ride and would have to walk. It was the policy of our school that if there was a young child and no one to care for him, rather than keep an older child at home to babysit and deprive him or her of schooling, as long as the younger child could walk, Professor Nash allowed the child to come to school. That was what the Caldwell boys of Riceville did. When they walked they would carry the youngest. He couldn't have been over two years of age. Only sickness kept them from school. They grew up to be good, prosperous, happy, well adjusted people who were also generous.

Another friend had no shoes but he came to school anyway. He wore a pair of high heeled sandals. He laughed and we laughed but he came to school.

There were no regular cafeterias in those days. I know of quite a



few who lived as far as two miles out who went home for dinner (that is what it was called in those days), and they would be back in time for the next period. Brown paper bags were very much around.

Our home economics teacher, Miss Alexander, taught her students how to place material on a pattern so as to save on material. She would make us mend our clothing if we happened to wear something that was torn.

She had a work program where we could get on-the-job training. She taught her students how to cook, how to plan a menu, how to set the table properly using all of that silverware that would come in a full set of silver. She also taught us how to serve and how to clean the table.

Some students never had a new book. Those who did shared theirs with the other students. I fell heir to my uncle's books. The first part of the books always had missing pages. Being the second of fourteen children had its drawbacks.

...Julian's Drug Store would tear the backs off of their magazines and throw them in the garbage. Books sold for 10 cents and we didn't have the dime to buy them. So we got them from the garbage. We had quite an extensive library which was good because my brother George loved to read. There were copies of **Wild West Weekly**, **Ranch Romance**, **Argosy**, **National Geographic**, **Doc Savage's The Spider**, **The Shadow**, and others. (Later in life George read everything. He was very well read.)

Our first grade teacher, Mrs. C.H. Wilson, was one of the truly great teachers. She used spools that thread had been on. She strung them up the whole length of the blackboard. From those spools we learned to count, to add, to multiply - even our ABC's and Bible verses.

Teachers were allowed to spank. One teacher took one of my brothers and put his head between her knees and spanked him. He turned his head and bit her, and that ended that kind of spanking.

...It was the first day of school for brother David (Pete). When he came home my mother asked him what he had learned. He told her all about Moses leading the children of Israel out of Egypt and also about the burning bush. In the meantime three more brothers came in and my mother bragged on Pete. Clarence (Pop) said, "Oh that wasn't anything. Didn't ole Abraham go in the kitchen and get a child by the maid?"

...The first day of school for the baby boy (Haroldean) was also his last for a year. When he came home he told my mother that he heard God talking to him. (Professor Nash had installed an intercom.) My mother asked what did God say. Harold said that God said, "Children be quiet." His twin sister didn't scare so easily. She remained a grade ahead of him until high school but they graduated



together.

...We celebrated May Day. It was a fun day with all kinds of sports activities. Ice cream and sandwiches were sold on the grounds. We plaited the May Pole and crowned a King and Queen. We looked forward to May Day.

Teachers were paid forty dollars a month when they could collect. I thought they were rich. My first job paid me one dollar and a half a week and those days were long.

...I think there was a Four-H Club that taught us how to plant gardens. That was the way it was until the WPA, CCC, and all of those other initials came along. Jobs came into being and things began to pick up.<sup>77</sup>

Professor Nash and his group of dedicated teachers brought hope and education to hundreds of black students throughout the 1930's and served education for many years after the Great Depression. In 1932 enrollment at Cook High was the highest in the school's long history. A program that began at Cook as an "idea" became the first on-the-job training program in the state of Tennessee. The black schools served as a stabilizing influence in the community. They offered students the best hope for the future.

## LISTS, GRAPHS, AND TABLES

### LIST I

#### McMINN COUNTY

#### LIST OF ELEMENTARY TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS\*

1935-1936

Athens Practice (TWC) .....	Miss Otho Burn
Cambria .....	Miss Mildred Rutherford
	Miss Helen Cochran
Calhoun .....	Mr. Bill Whitaker
	Mrs. Katherine Whitaker
	Miss Grace Whitaker
	Mrs. Fannie Blevens
	Mrs. Grace Hambright
	Miss Pearl McAlister
	Mr. Dillard Barnett
	Miss Jo Blevens
Claxton .....	Mr. Franklin Henry
	Miss Margrete Grubb
	Mrs. Catherine Gentry
	Miss Gladys McDonald
	Mrs. Vallie Firestone
	Mr. Beuford Barker
Clay Hill .....	Mrs. Pearl Parris

\*Minutes of the McMinn County Board of Education, 14 March 1935, 91.

Clearwater .....	Mrs. Bertie Lingerfelt Miss Joy Allen
Carlock .....	Mr. Harry E. Newman Miss Carmen Akins Miss Clara Gannada Miss Elizabeth Berrong
Conasauga .....	Mrs. Miza Cooper
Dogwood .....	Miss Margrete Ware
Etowah East. ....	Mr. Dan Ivins Miss Willie Sue Wade Miss Imogene Allen Miss Mary Ruth Nichols
Etowah North. ....	Mr. Miles Coe Miss Eleanor Carter Miss Margrete Tarwater Mrs. Annie L. Duncan
Fairview .....	Miss Lillian Thomas Miss Elizabeth Moses
Gravel Hill .....	Miss Hannah Scott Miss Charlotte Gibson
Goodsprings .....	Mr. Buenos Baker Miss Alma Frances Holsclaw Miss Mary Loy Mrs. Georgia Trotter
Hillsview .....	Mr. Herbert Reed Mr. Joe Shelton Mr. Dave Roderick Miss Allie Boyd Miss Virginia Large Miss Pauline Hunt
Hortons .....	Miss Lorine Miller
Idlewild .....	Mr. Harry E. Ward Mrs. Louisa Carroll Mrs. Henry Gettys Mrs. Reul Ware
Longs. ....	Mrs. Horace Baker
Lamontville .....	Mrs. Fannie Maddox Miss Ruth McAlister
Liberty Hill. ....	Mrs. Nell Maxwell Mrs. Nell Brown
Liberty North. ....	Mr. Horten Guthery Mrs. Mary Kimbrough
Liberty South .....	Mrs. Marty McMurray
Macedonia .....	Mr. Hubert Cochran
Moors Chapel. ....	Mr. Spurgeon Simpson
Manilla .....	Miss Mary Ellen Reynolds
Marshall Hill .....	Mrs. William Fillers
Mecca .....	Mr. Rufus Everhart
Millers Chapel .....	Miss Lucy Thomas
Mouse Creek. ....	Miss Emma Fellenn Mrs. Carrie Swafford
Mt. Arnon .....	Miss Etza McBrayer
Mt. Cumberland .....	Mr. Wayne Strickland Mrs. Ruth Chambers

Mt. Harmony .....	Mrs. H.J. Daugherty
	Miss Sarah Lou McMahan
Mt. Lebanon .....	Miss Cora Sharp
	Miss Dollie Thomas
Mt. Zion .....	Mr. Frank Perry
New Bethel .....	Mrs. Cecil Sexton
	Miss Unice Wilson
Niota .....	Mr. J. Will Foster
	Mrs. Grace Thomas
	Miss Lula Sexton
	Mrs. Olive Burn
	Miss Browder Cate
	Miss Lucy Lynn Foster
	Mrs. Ara V. Snyder
	Miss Dorothy Forrest
	Miss Juliette McCorkle
Nonaburg .....	Mrs. Mary Sue Gregory
	Miss Grace Fergerson
Oak Grove .....	Miss Ella Derrick
Pendergas .....	Miss Helen Shepherd
Pine Hill .....	Mrs. Mary Elliott
Pine Grove .....	Mr. William Fillers
Piney Grove .....	Mr. John Hamilton
	Mrs. Beulah Melton
Pleasant Grove North .....	Miss Grace Taylor
Pleasant Grove South .....	Mr. John Higganbotham
	Miss Maude Horton
	Miss Irene Green
Poplar Hill .....	Mrs. Della Legg
	Mrs. Johnnie Armstrong
Post Oak .....	Mrs. Erma Leath
Riceville .....	Mr. George W. Galloway
	Miss Ruth Lockmiller
	Miss Elizabeth Roberts
	Miss Pearl Perkinson
	Miss Lucile Swafford
	Miss Ella Womac
Rocky Mount .....	Miss Maude Gudger
Rogers Creek .....	Miss Grace Bonner
Russells .....	Mrs. Minnie Dodson
Sewee .....	Mrs. Edna Kennedy
Shady Grove .....	Mr. C.W. Puett
	Mrs. Ruth Dunn
Sharps Chapel .....	Mr. R.D. Malone
	Miss Nell Bishop
Slacks Chapel .....	Mr. Hubert Cochran
Tranquility .....	Miss Eva Lingerfelt
	Mrs. Ruby Ketron
Union Grove .....	Mr. J.A. Gentry
	Miss Ruth McAmis
	Miss Hazel Foster
	Miss Helen Ward

Wesleyana .....	Mrs. Catherine Redmond
	Mrs. Myrtle Pickens
	Mrs. Ollie York
Zion Hill .....	Mrs. Marie Boggess
	Miss Annie Sliger

LIST II  
McMINN COUNTY  
LIST OF HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS\*  
1935-1936

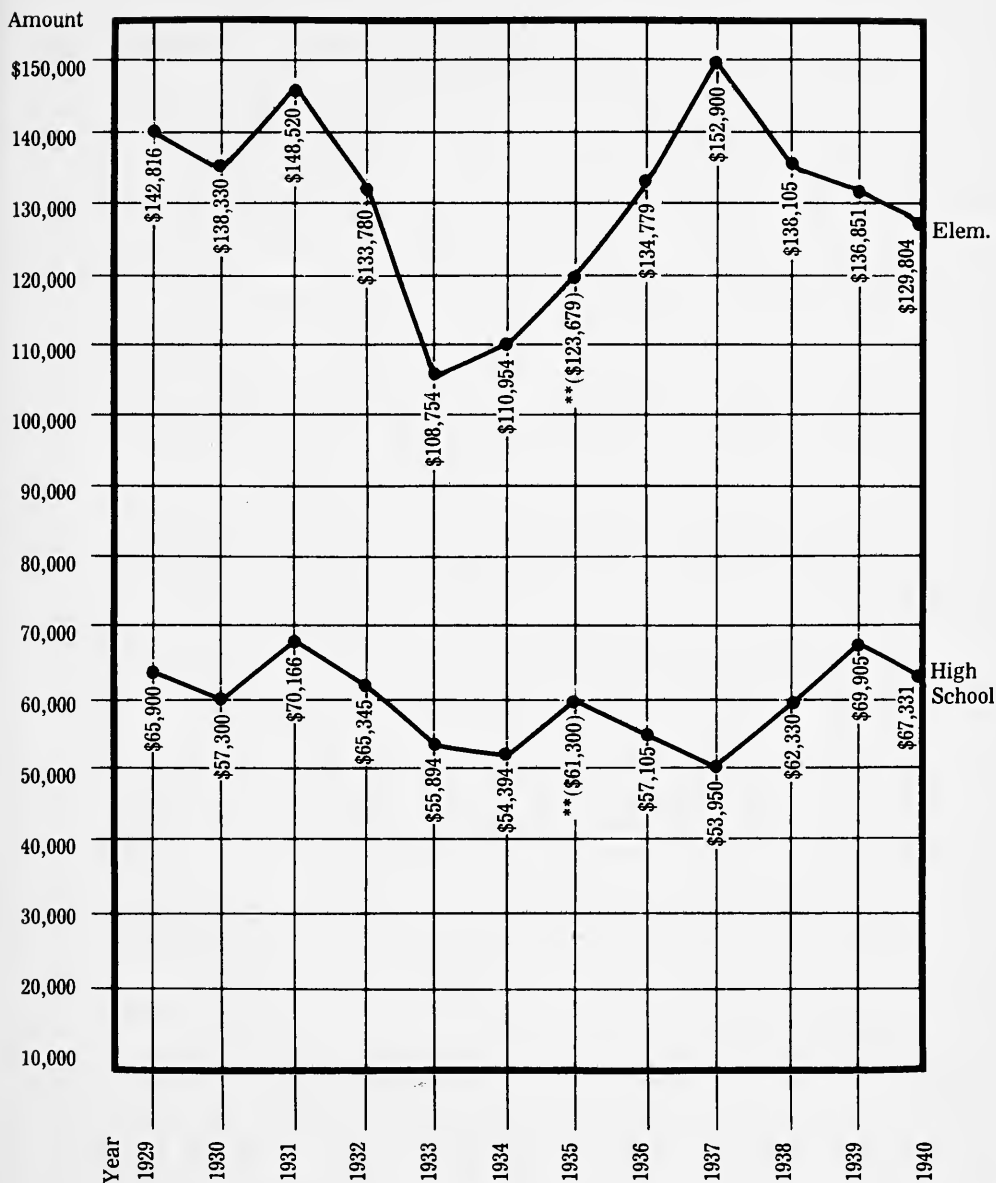
Calhoun.....	Mr. W.F. Whitaker
Claxton .....	Mr. Austin A. Hanks
Etowah High School .....	Mr. William H. Tarwater
	Miss Reta Berrong
	Mrs. Ivera Bonine
	Miss Margrete Wells
	Miss Ruby Cochran
	Miss Winnie Hamby
	Miss Ella B. Payne
	Mrs. Paul Dodd
	Mr. E.A. Hetznner
	Mr. Lake Roberson
	Miss Jessie Kelley
	Mr. J.A. Hoover
	Mrs. William H. Tarwater
Hillsview.....	Mr. Herbert Reed
	Miss Sue Prince
	Miss Dennis Blevens
Idlewild.....	Mr. Harry E. Ward
McMinn County High School .....	Mr. B.L. Hale
	Mr. G.L. Harris
	Miss Martha Taylor
	Mr. Fred Puett
	Mr. Lewis J. Harrod
	Miss Maude Smith
	Mrs. Bess Cofer
	Mrs. Carolyn Foster
	Miss Nellie Ruth Ray
	Mr. William Willson
	Mrs. Lucile Anderson
Niota .....	Mr. R.G. Carr
Riceville .....	Mr. George W. Galloway
Union Grove.....	Mr. J.A. Gentry

Some schools are not included in either list because they were city schools. In 1935 the Athens City Schools included Forrest Hill School and North City School. (North City transferred to the city system from McMinn County in the early 1930's.) Ingleside School was built in 1937 with PWA funds. Athens City Schools also included the elementary part of J.L. Cook School for black students. Etowah had a city school. Englewood had a city school. (It returned to the McMinn County System in 1937.)

**\*Minutes of the McMinn County Board of Education, 14 March 1935, 91.**  
The spelling of places and names is spelling used in minutes.

# GRAPH I

## SCHOOL BUDGETS IN McMINN COUNTY, 1929-1940\*

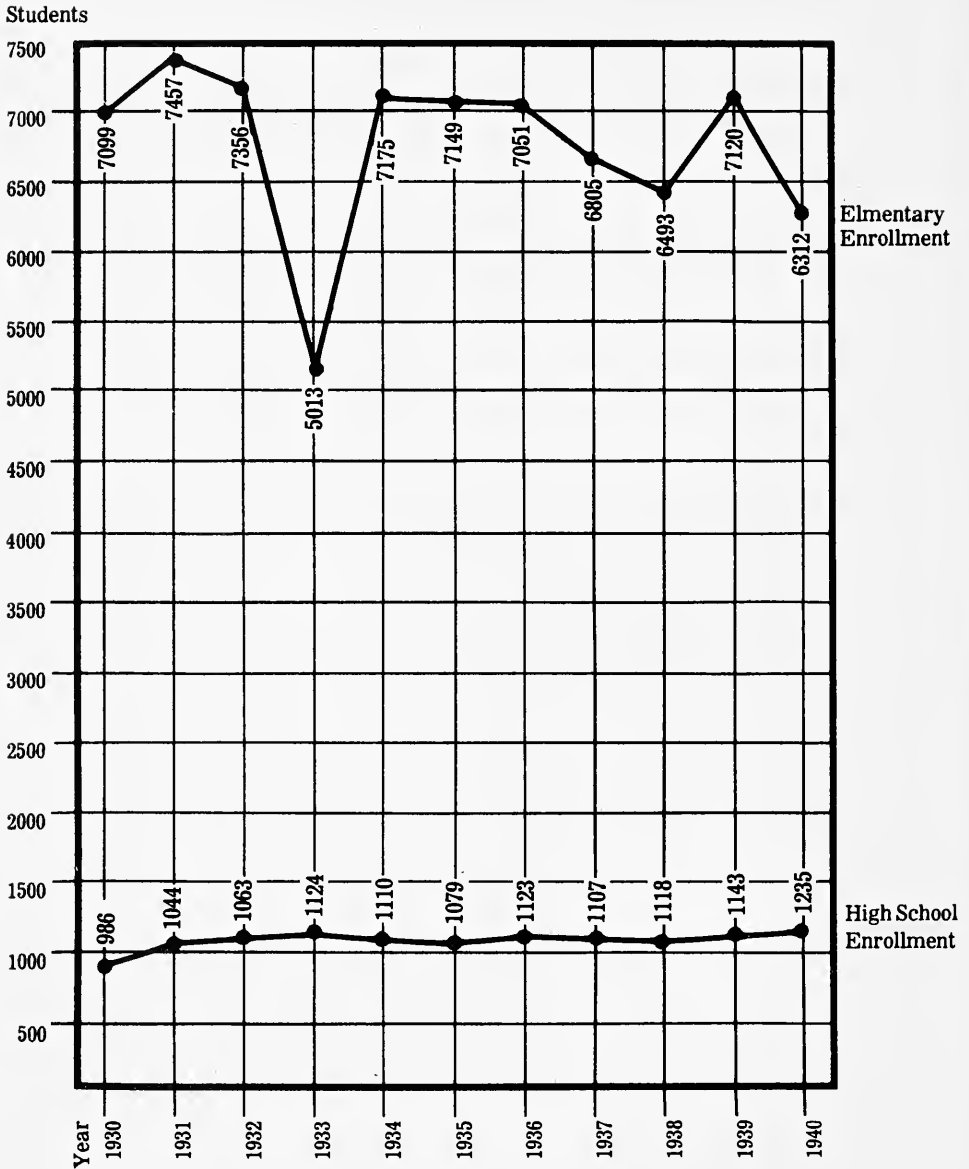


\*Minutes of the McMinn County Quarterly Court, 19 December 1929 through 1 April 1940.

\*\* (Proposed Budget) Minutes of the McMinn County Board of Education, 14 March 1935, 90.

GRAPH II

TOTAL ENROLLMENT IN McMINN COUNTY, 1930-1940\*

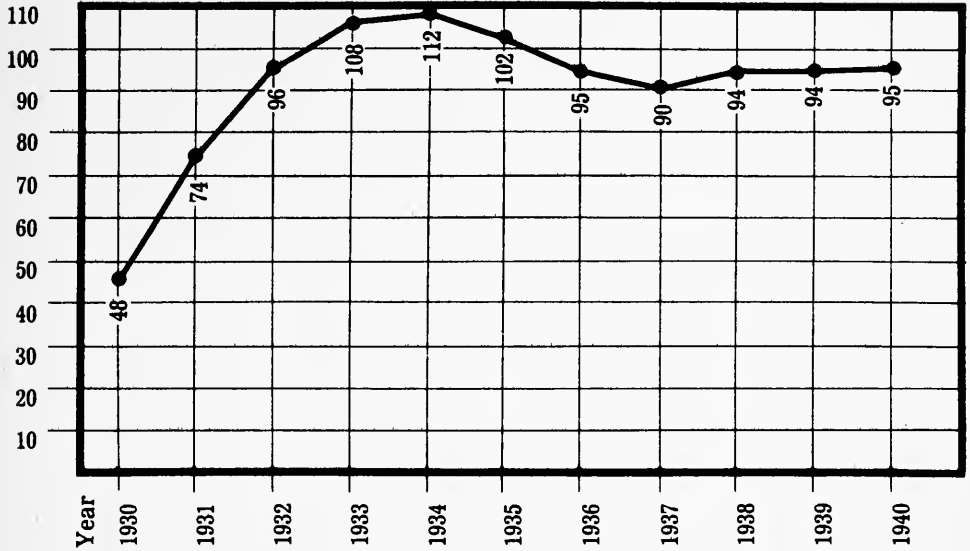


\*Annual Report of the Department of Education, State of Tennessee, For the Scholastic Years, 1930-1940.

### GRAPH III

#### TOTAL BLACK ENROLLMENT AT HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL\*

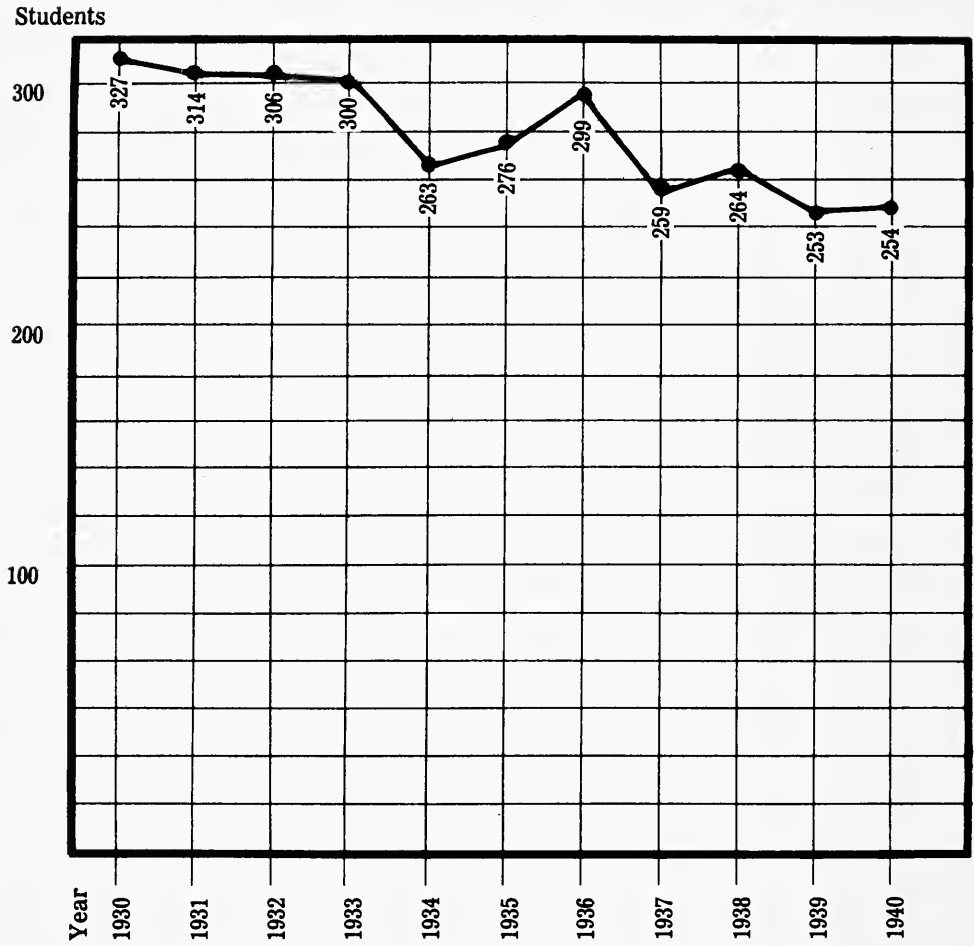
Students



\*Annual Report of the Department of Education, State of Tennessee, For the Scholastic years, 1930-1940.

GRAPH IV

AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE  
OF McMINN COUNTY BLACK ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS\*



\*Annual Report of the Department of Education, State of Tennessee, For the Scholastic Years, 1930-1940.



**TABLE I**  
**NUMBER OF SCHOOLS IN McMINN COUNTY, 1930-1940\***

Year	Elementary Schools	High Schools	Beginning	Consolidated	End
1930	78	11	8		8
1931	80	10	8		8
1932	79	11	12		12
1933	75	11	12		12
1934	73	11	11		12
1935	70	11	No Report		
1936	72	11	No Report		
1937	64	11	No Report		
1938	65	10	No Report		
1939	67	10	No Report		
1940	65	10	No Report		

\*Annual Report of the Department of Education, State of Tennessee, For the Scholastic Years, 1930-1940.

**TABLE II**  
**SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION IN McMINN COUNTY, 1930-1940\***

Year	Number				Cost Per Pupil
	Wagons	Cars/ Trucks	Other Buses	All-Steel Buses	
1930	22	17	0	0	\$ 2.00 per month
1931	13	25	0	0	2.24 per month
1932	7	24	0	0	2.30 per month
1933	5	28	0	0	2.14 per month
1934	5	25	0	0	1.80 per month
1935	5	26	0	0	1.71 per month
1936	3	33	0	0	2.00 per month
1937	3	34	0	0	19.79 per year
1938	0	2	32	0	15.82 eight months
1939	0	3	32	1	15.50 eight months
1940	0	2	28	4	17.26 eight months

\*Annual Report of the Department of Education, State of Tennessee, For the Scholastic Years, 1930-1940.

## NOTES

1. **Minutes of the McMinn County Board of Education**, 4 January 1932, 60.
2. **Ibid.**, 75; **Athens Daily Post-Athenian**, 2 April 1940.
3. Col. W.W. Eledge, interview by author, February 1983.
4. Effie Wood Bigham, informal conversations with author, 5 April 1983, 7 July 1983.
5. Nellie Ruth Bowers, letter to author, March 1983; **Minutes Board of Education**, 10 July 1939, 155.
6. **Etowah Enterprise**, 22 August 1935; **Daily Post-Athenian**, 3 April 1939.
7. **Annual Report of the Department of Education, State of Tennessee**, for the Scholastic Year Ending 30 June 1930, 95, 155; **Annual Report of the Department of Education, State of Tennessee**, for the Scholastic Year Ending 30 June 1940, 107, 161.
8. **Minutes Board of Education**, 14 December 1933, 85, 13 December 1934, 89.
9. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 7 July 1932.
10. Frances Buttram Wade, letter to author, May 1983.
11. June Reed Stephens, letter to Bill Akins, April 1983.
12. **Minutes Board of Education**, 30 June 1939, 160.
13. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 2 July 1936; **Etowah Enterprise**, 25 August 1932.
14. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 2 September 1931.
15. Eledge interview.
16. **Minutes Board of Education**, 55, 69; **Daily Post-Athenian**, 7 July 1932.
17. **Minutes of Athens Board of Aldermen**, 14 December 1931.
18. **Minutes Board of Education**, 45.
19. **Tennessee Valley Authority, Industrial Data**, April 1934, 43.
20. Jessie McCurdy, telephone conversation with author, 1 February 1983.
21. **Minutes Board of Education**, 3 November 1931, 57-59, 23 July 1936, 103; **Daily Post-Athenian**, 3,4,7 November 1931; Prof. B.L. Hale, interview by author, 29 December 1982.
22. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 16 November 1933, 20 December 1933.
23. **Ibid.**, 5 April 1933.
24. Blanche Moses, telephone conversation with author, 23 April 1983.
25. **Minutes Board of Education**, 22 May 1937, 109.
26. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 27 November 1934, 14 February 1938.
27. Stephens letter.
28. Eledge interview.
29. Willard Yarbrough, letters to author, 4, 14 January 1983.
30. Ruth Buttram Miller, letter to author, May 1983.

31. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 19, 27 December 1935, 22 January 1936.
32. Marie Orr Milligan, letter to author, 13 April 1983.
33. Eledge interview.
34. Bigham informal conversation.
35. Miller letter.
36. Stephens letter.
37. Eledge interview; John Middleton, telephone conversation with author, 7 July 1983.
38. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 3 June 1936.
39. **Ibid.**, 26 January 1933.
40. **Ibid.**, 21 March 1940.
41. Charles Morris, interview by Bill Akins, 3 March 1983.
42. James C. Burris, **Mouse Creek Elementary School Directory**, 1912-1959, 24.
43. Paul J. Walker, telephone conversation with author, 12 July 1983.
44. **Annual Report of the Department of Education**, State of Tennessee, for the Year Ending 1930-1931; Hale interview.
45. Will J. Swafford, telephone conversation with author, 12 July 1983; **Etowah Enterprise**, 17 June 1935.
46. **Daily Post-Athenian**, 17 June 1936, 2 April 1940.
47. Eledge interview.
48. Marian Cochran, letter to author, March 1983.
49. Eledge interview.
50. William P. Willson, telephone conversation with author, 8 July 1983.
51. Hale interview.
52. **Ibid.**, Thomas Mayfield, telephone conversation with author, 12 July 1983; **Minutes Board of Education**, 29 March 1940, 188.
53. Frank Willson, telephone conversation with author, 8 July 1983.
54. Hale interview.
55. **Etowah Enterprise**, 22 August 1935; William P. Willson telephone conversation.
56. Cochran letter.
57. Stephens letter; Miller letter.
58. Eledge interview.
59. **Ibid.**, Stephens letter.
60. Yarbrough letter.
61. **Ibid.**
62. Prof. W.E. Nash, interview by Zelma Nash McClure, n.d.; Prof. W.E. Nash, "A Lesson in Cooperation," **The United Presbyterian** 105 (3 February 1947), 13-14; Chuck Redfern, "Nash Born 50 Years Too Soon?," **Daily Post-Athenian**, 11 June 1980; Prof. W.E. Nash, interview by author, 28 December 1982.
63. Prof. W.E. Nash, "Negro Education Progresses Through Years in McMinn," **Daily Post-Athenian**, Sesquicentennial Edition, 1969; Prof. W.E. Nash, interview by Verdell Latham, n.d., tape recording,

Knoxville College.

64. Prof. W.E. Nash, "Negro Schools Began in 1920's," **Daily Post-Athenian**, Bicentennial Edition, July 1976.
65. Nash-Ealy interview.
66. **Ibid.**, **Annual Report of the Department of Education**, State of Tennessee, for the Scholastic Years Ending 1930-1940.
67. **Minutes Board of Education**, 44; Nash-Ealy interview; Prof. W.E. Nash, informal conversation with author, April 1983.
68. Nash-McClure interview.
69. **Scrapbook**, prepared for Prof. W.E. Nash by the Athens Educational Association on his receiving the first E. Harper Johnson Human Relations Award from the Tennessee Education Association, June 1980.
70. **Minutes Board of Education**, 44.
71. Maria Trotta, letters to author, 15, 25 July 1983.
72. **Ibid.**
73. Nash-Ealy interview.
74. J. Neal Ensminger, telephone conversation with author, 30 April 1983.
75. Nash-Ealy interview.
76. Prof. W.E. Nash, letter to the editor, **Daily Post-Athenian**, 15 March 1983.
77. Amy Dickerson Johnson, letter to author, 3 February 1983.

## Chapter 5

### Tennessee Wesleyan College: The Depression Years

By Genevieve Wiggins

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When the Great Depression struck the nation, Tennessee Wesleyan College was operating as a junior college under the auspices of the Methodist Episcopal Church, having severed its connection with the University of Chattanooga in 1925. Until 1933, high school or preparatory courses were offered in addition to two years of college work. Prior to 1929, four years of preparatory study were available; in 1929, this program was reduced to two years, in 1931, to one year, and in 1933, eliminated altogether.<sup>1</sup>

Emphasis was upon liberal arts instruction, but teacher training courses and commercial courses attracted a considerable number of students. Those enrolled in the college pursued either a Diploma Course, two years of traditional liberal arts study for those planning to transfer to a four-year institution; a Terminal Diploma Course, designed for those not expecting to pursue further college study; a Normal Diploma Course, for prospective teachers; or a Commercial Course in business training. As part of the teacher training program, an observation and practice school on the campus admitted elementary students and was built on the plan recommended by the Tennessee Department of Education for two-room rural schools.<sup>2</sup>

In 1930, the community of Athens had a population of six thousand and was described in the college bulletin as a "progressive" town which enjoyed the advantages of pure air and water, was "practically exempt from epidemic diseases," and was "unusually free from vice." By 1939, the population of the college town had grown to eight thousand.<sup>3</sup>

The student body was drawn largely from the surrounding area with sixty percent of students from nearby high schools who attended any college enrolling at Tennessee Wesleyan. Hence, most students were from rural homes. Approximately one-third of the student body went on from Tennessee Wesleyan to a four year institution.<sup>4</sup>

The president of the college throughout the thirties was James L. Robb. A 1906 graduate of the institution when it was known as Grant University, he had furthered his education at Northwestern University. The leadership of President Robb proved to be a strong factor in the college's survival of the Depression.<sup>5</sup>

Enrollment figures between 1930 and 1940 indicate that the cost of a college education was beyond the reach of a sizeable number of persons who might have enrolled at Tennessee Wesleyan during more affluent times. The greatest enrollment decrease occurred in 1931. There were 485 students in attendance during the academic year 1929-30 with a slight decrease to 457 in 1930-31, but enrollment dropped to 302 in 1931-32, a loss of 155 students or about one-third of the student body in only one year. By 1934-35, enrollment had reached its lowest figure, 283, only 58 percent of the 1929 student body. During the thirties enrollment never again grew beyond 345. Since the student population between 1925 and 1929 averaged about 500, one may assume that the considerable decrease during the thirties was due primarily to the "hard times" of the Depression years.<sup>6</sup>



The parlor of Bennett Hall, a dormitory for women at Tennessee Wesleyan, which was replaced by Sarah Merner Lawrence Hall in 1943.

Courtesy of Tennessee Wesleyan College

A further indication of the need for families to curtail expenses is the sharp decline during the thirties in the number of special students enrolled at the college for private lessons in piano, violin, voice, art, and elocution. Such private instruction was given not only to regular college students but to others in the area, especially to children of elementary school age. In 1929-30, 52 such students were receiving music lessons and 41 lessons in elocution or "expression," as it was called. In 1930-31, the number of special music students had declined to 36 and the number of expression students to 14. In a period when parents were finding difficulty in supplying food and clothing to their children, music lessons and expression lessons were frills which had to be cut from the family budget.<sup>7</sup>

The college adjusted its rates in an attempt to accommodate students who were struggling with unprecedented financial problems. Tuition remained set at \$35 per quarter until 1939 when it was raised to \$40 quarterly. Fairly sizeable reductions were made, however, in charges for room and board. The total cost per student for tuition, room, and board during the academic year 1930-31 ranged from \$312 to \$402, depending upon the dormitory occupied, with an average cost per student of \$363 for the school year. In 1931-32, the average student cost was reduced to \$315.<sup>8</sup>

In the summer of 1932, President Robb announced a further reduction in rates for the approaching 1932-33 term, describing this reduction as "an effort to adjust to present conditions and to do all within power to enable young men and women to attend college this year." A reduction was made in dormitory rates ranging from 12 to 18.7 percent. At Bennett Hall, Robeson Hall, and Petty-Manker Hall, the rate for room and board was reduced by 12 percent and at Ritter Hall by 18.7 percent. Fees charged at Ritter Hall were consistently lower than those at other dormitories since the young ladies residing there performed certain domestic duties to partially defray the cost of their education.<sup>9</sup>

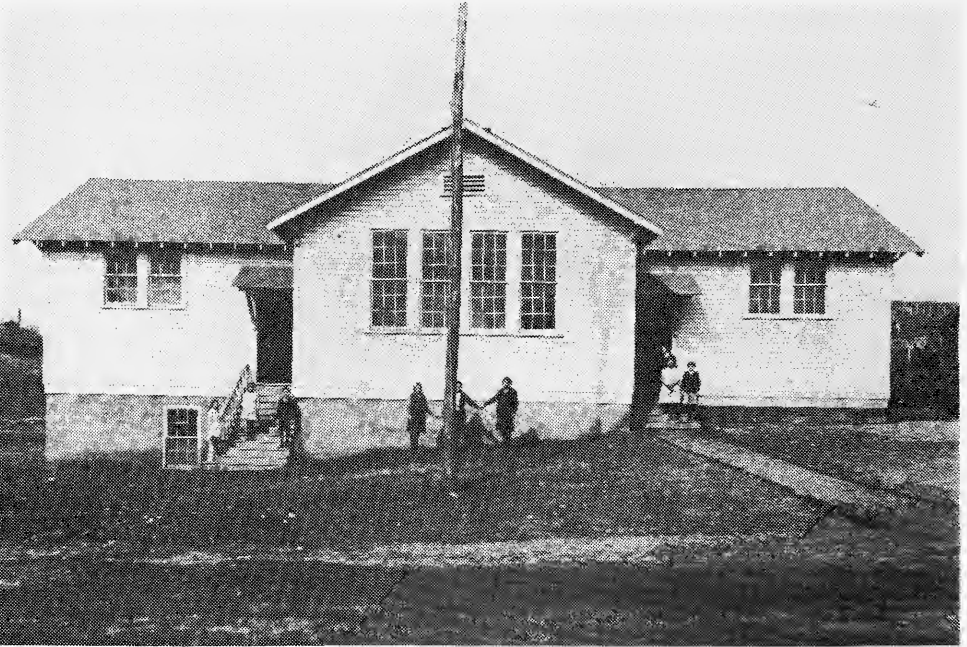
President Robb emphasized that the lowering of rates did not mean the lowering of academic standards. These, he said, were to be preserved at a high level "in spite of all obstacles."<sup>10</sup>

Two dormitories were closed during the thirties. Hatfield Hall was not occupied after 1930, and Robeson Hall was closed in 1936.<sup>11</sup>

At the time of the stock market crash in 1929, Tennessee Wesleyan was in its fifth year of operation as a junior college independent of the University of Chattanooga. Having made a drastic change, the institution was in a transition period, and problems, including financial ones, might be expected. In his annual report to the Board of Trustees in June, 1927, President Robb discussed the college's financial difficulties and appealed to the trustees for assistance. A financial committee of the Board of Trustees concluded that \$32,000 would be required before the end of the 1927-28 term for operating expenses, for payment of debts, and for covering the anticipated \$10,000 deficit. The college was already in serious trouble; its ability to survive the additional problems brought

about by the Great Depression seems nothing short of a miracle. But faith brings about miracles, and President Robb and the dedicated men and women of his faculty were persons with faith.<sup>12</sup>

A campaign for the raising of \$500,000 was initiated, and by December, 1928, pledges had reached \$297,062. Because of the Depression, however, many of these pledges were never collected.<sup>13</sup>



Observation and Practice School, Tennessee Wesleyan.

Courtesy of Tennessee Wesleyan College

At a February, 1932 meeting of the faculty, a special faculty committee reported on ways and means of balancing the budget. According to this report, the average annual salary of full-time instructors was \$1,718, \$332 lower than the average salary of instructors at seventeen other junior colleges surveyed. Nevertheless, the committee recommended that each employee contribute ten percent of the last four salary checks received in 1932 to the college. Those receiving other emoluments or benefits in lieu of salary were to contribute ten percent of such benefits. The committee noted that this contribution was proposed as “a means of doing our share in meeting the extraordinary situation” faced by the college.<sup>14</sup>

Among the “emoluments and benefits” mentioned were President Robb’s housing, valued at \$50 monthly; housing for five other faculty members with values ranging from \$7.50 to \$25; and board and room, valued at \$25 monthly, for five employees.<sup>15</sup>



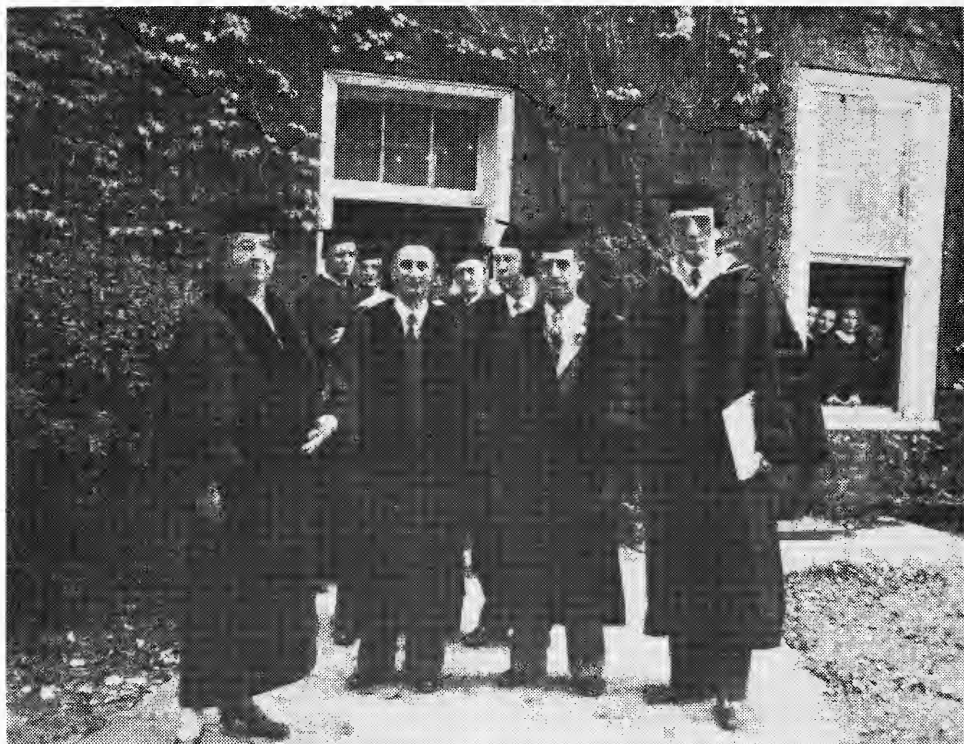
The proposal of the committee was adopted by the faculty with the amendment that college employees who annually received less than \$500 in cash or other emoluments be excluded. The proposal passed with 12 affirmative and two negative votes. When the motion was made that the vote be made unanimous, there were 13 affirmative votes and one abstention.<sup>16</sup>

At the February 23, 1932 faculty meeting, the business manager reported that funds had not arrived from the Board of Education of the Holston Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church and that monthly checks would be issued late. A few checks, he said, might be issued to those to whom the immediate receipt of salary was "absolutely necessary."<sup>17</sup>

Since not only college employees but also business and professional townspeople were in financial straits, the college offered a barter system in 1933. Persons owing money to the college for tuition, for other benefits, or in endowment pledges could make credit available to college employees. The value of the goods or services received by the college employee would be deducted from the employee's salary, and the cooperating business or professional person would receive an appropriate deduction in his account with the college. For example, a college teacher could buy a shirt, valued at \$1.95 at Thomas Clothing Company. The merchant would have \$1.95 deducted from the amount he owed the college, and the teacher would have the same amount deducted from his salary. No money changed hands, a suitable arrangement since little money was available. In 1933, the faculty also voted that each employee donate one-half of his last pay check to the college.<sup>18</sup>

Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Myers arrived at Tennessee Wesleyan in August, 1934, to serve respectively as professor of religion and an assistant in the library. Mrs. Myers recalls that their move to Athens was the result of the closing of the Methodist junior college in Chicago where they had taught since 1927, a closing necessitated by financial exigency. Mr. and Mrs. Myers had been promised housing in a small campus bungalow which was not ready for occupancy upon their arrival. They found their prospective home filled with potatoes from the college farm; they had to store their furniture and live in Ritter Hall until the little house was ready.<sup>19</sup>

Mrs. Myers describes their "rudest awakening" as being the discovery that payment of salaries was four months in arrears. Before they knew of this situation, the couple had spent most of their meager savings on a cooking stove, water heater, refrigerator, and coal-burning heater for warming the house. By practicing rigid economy, they were able to survive until Thanksgiving when they received one-half of their stipulated salary with another half-check coming at Christmas. Mrs. Myers sewed dresses and suits for townspeople and for a few faculty wives to provide money for groceries and utilities.<sup>20</sup>



Leading participants in the dedication of the Merner-Pfeiffer Library, 1941; (left to right) Mrs. Henry Pfeiffer, Bishop Paul B. Kern, Governor Prentiss Cooper, T.W.C. President James L. Robb.

Courtesy of Tennessee Wesleyan College

By the spring of 1935, conditions were apparently improving somewhat, for the faculty was assured that salaries for the year would be paid in full. Again, however, the teachers voted to return a portion of their wages to the college, in this case ten percent of one month's salary.<sup>21</sup>

President Robb was exceptionally active and adept in fund-raising and traveled extensively, especially during the later thirties, seeking support for the college. In February, 1935, after a trip to New York and Washington, D.C., the president reported opportunities to be "opening up for the college in the way of financial support both from foundations and individuals."<sup>22</sup>

Among the several profitable contacts made by President Robb, the most profitable proved to be his acquaintance with Mr. and Mrs. Henry Pfeiffer, owners of a large chemical company and residents of New York City. In 1935, Mrs. Pfeiffer agreed to supply a part of the funds for current operations and also to provide a portion of the amount needed to cover the anticipated deficit. Because of the generosity of the Pfeiffers, there was no deficit in 1935.<sup>23</sup>

For more than a decade, the Pfeiffers were generous friends of the college, each year providing funds for current operations. In addition to these contributions and the funding of a sprinkler system for Ritter Hall, the Pfeiffers gave the college a total of \$441,666. Their generosity contributed heavily toward the construction of the Merner-Pfeiffer Library in 1941 and the James L. Robb Gymnasium in 1950. Sarah Merner Lawrence Hall, a dormitory for women which was named for Mrs. Pfeiffer's sister, was constructed in 1943 and funded entirely by Mrs. Pfeiffer.<sup>24</sup>

Howard Bales, at that time an employee of Miles Riddle Drugstore, recalls the visit to Athens by members of the Pfeiffer family at the time of the dedication of the Merner-Pfeiffer Library. Dr. Robb came into the drugstore and was asked by Bales where the affluent family was to be lodged. The president had a twinkle in his eye as he replied, "I plan to have them stay on the campus." The result was what the astute president seems to have had in mind. Funds were donated for a new women's dormitory after the Pfeiffers' brief sojourn in Bennett Hall, a facility apparently somewhat less than luxurious.<sup>25</sup>

Some assistance also came to the college during the Depression years from the Carnegie Foundation, chiefly in the form of a grant for library books in 1937.<sup>26</sup>

Beginning in 1934, some federal aid for needy students became available in the form of National Youth Administration and Federal Emergency Relief Administration grants. In a September, 1935 faculty meeting, President Robb asked the faculty for suggestions for projects for student workers holding federal work grants. In September, 1936, it was announced that federal funds had been provided for seven additional NYA workshops to assist "those affected by the drought." The severe droughts of the mid-thirties had affected not only the Dust Bowl states but virtually the entire country, a particularly disastrous drought occurring in 1936. One retired farm agent recalls not being able to see the sun at midday because of the dust and an absence of rainfall from planting time to harvest time. Since most students at Tennessee Wesleyan came from rural families, the unusual weather conditions had added still another obstacle to providing income for a college education.<sup>27</sup>

Small economies and fund-raising projects were customary during these lean years. In 1930, there was considerable discussion by the faculty of the need for new hymnals for chapel services, but with no extra funds available, mimeographed copies of songs were provided in lieu of new hymnals. The faculty was encouraged to read the *Junior College Journal*, but the college budget could not cover the cost of a library subscription; each faculty member was asked to contribute 25 cents toward this subscription. Outsiders were, in 1934, asked to pay ten cents for the use of a college tennis court, a sign being posted on each court indicating that playing tennis on Sunday was not permissible. Sigma Iota Chi Sorority

raised money for a 60-dollar scholarship by making a quilt and selling spaces for names embroidered on the quilt at ten cents a space.<sup>28</sup>

Tennessee Wesleyan students had little freedom to spend money in the unlikely event that they had any to spend. Stringent rules of the thirties forbade card playing, dancing, smoking, or visiting pool rooms. A young man might sit with a young lady in the parlor of the young lady's dormitory during a designated period on Sunday afternoon under the supervision of a chaperone. Male and female students could not sit together in the daily required chapel services. College women could not leave the campus without special permission of the faculty, and men must sign out before leaving the residence hall. In 1936, the faculty voted to approve that "boys who had not abused the social privileges be permitted to call for the girls and take them to church and prayer meeting on Sunday and Wednesday evenings," but this privilege was to be enjoyed in groups, not by individual couples. Not until 1939 did the faculty approve unchaperoned dates in groups to campus affairs, "picture shows," and football games on the McMinn County High School athletic field. In 1939, girls still could not go to town without special permission, but couples might go out in town unchaperoned during the period from 3 to 5 p.m. on Sunday afternoon, provided they checked out and definitely stated where they planned to go. Alcoholic beverages were, of course, absolutely taboo. In a student newspaper of 1930, student columnist Neal Ensminger wrote: "Wesleyan surely is for the Eighteenth Amendment. Even the fountain at Banfield is bone dry!"<sup>29</sup>

Hampered by financial difficulties and stringent rules, did the students at Tennessee Wesleyan during the thirties have any fun? Being normal, high-spirited young people, of course they did.

During the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, student social life had revolved mainly around the literary societies, the Athenian and Philomathian societies for men and the Sapphonian and Knightonian societies for women. Interest in these societies declined during the thirties as students became more interested in the sororities and fraternities with activities of a less pedantic and more social nature. The Sappho-Athenian Literary Society, composed of the combined Sapphonians and Athenians, agreed to forfeit its charter in 1936, and the life of the one remaining society was reported to be at "very low ebb" in 1938. The three sororities and two fraternities were local organizations with the exception of Sigma Iota Chi Sorority, established at TWC in 1931, and Phi Sigma Nu Fraternity which became part of a national junior college fraternity in 1932.

Most of the other student organizations were of a religious nature — the Wesleyan Brotherhood for ministerial students, the Wesleyan Service Club for men and women preparing for full-time Christian service, the Queen Esther Circle for prospective women missionaries, the Y.M.C.A., and the Y.W.C.A. Musical organizations were also prominent and in-



**Tennessee Wesleyan's football squad, the "Bulldogs," 1932-33.**  
 Courtesy of Tennessee Wesleyan College



**Tennessee Wesleyan's women's basketball team, 1930-31.**  
 Courtesy of Tennessee Wesleyan College

cluded a glee club and an orchestra. The Tennessee Wesleyan Girls' Chorus was invited to sing for the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, held in Columbus, Ohio, in May, 1936. Another popular activity was debate, and the college's debate team had an outstanding record during the thirties. In 1931, the team won the Junior College Championship of Tennessee and North Carolina and, in the same year, second place in the Southern Tournament of the Southern Association of Colleges, defeating such formidable opponents as Louisiana State University, the University of Florida, and the University of North Carolina.<sup>31</sup>

Athletic activities were also popular. Strong school spirit supported the basketball teams (men and women), the tennis team, and the football team, the "Bulldogs." In 1935, the Bulldogs were defeated only by the University of the South and by Middle Georgia and in 1938 won the Southeastern Junior College championship for the sixth consecutive year.<sup>32</sup>

Although college authorities frowned on dancing and card playing, movies or "picture shows" apparently did not come under censure. On January 14, 1935, the faculty voted that students who did not have classes on Wednesday at 10 a.m. might attend the morning showing of "Great Expectations" at the Strand Theater, admission ten cents. An especially popular film of 1930 was "Sunny Side Up," advertised by the Strand in the student publication, the *Nocatula*, as "the screen's first original all-talking, singing, dancing musical comedy with Charles Farrell and Janet Gaynor."<sup>33</sup>

The pleasures of students of the Depression years might seem quite unsophisticated to modern young people, but that generation found amusement in simple things. The big social event of the year was the all-school picnic held each May in the mountains near Tellico Plains for which the school rented a railroad car for transportation. In the summer of 1930, students made an afternoon trip to Craighead Cavern near Sweetwater and also traveled by school bus to view a performance of *Macbeth* at the University of Chattanooga auditorium. This latter trip was a momentous occasion since students were allowed to be out until 2 a.m.! On the bus they sang such popular favorites as "Keep Your Sunny Side Up" and "Carolina Moon."<sup>34</sup>

Judge Fred Puett recalls an amusing incident connected with the 1932 May Day excursion to the Tellico mountains. When the group arrived by train at Tellico, they dispersed to enjoy themselves in the mountain scenery, it being firmly understood that when the whistle blew, everyone was to return promptly to the train. One group of boys heard the whistle and realized that they had wandered such a distance away that they would have difficulty in returning on time. They attempted to use a shortcut and found themselves at the edge of a deep ravine which they could not jump across. They solved their problem by swinging them-



selves across on a tree branch. As they hurried toward their destination, they came across two faculty members, the male dean who taught history and the female religion teacher, behaving toward each other in a very friendly manner — “smooching” is Judge Puett’s term. When the history professor later heard of the tree-swinging episode, he said caustically, “Now at last I feel that I can believe in evolution.” One of the tree-swinging students quickly retorted, “And now at last I feel that I can pass history.”<sup>35</sup>

Not all entertainment was scheduled or faculty-approved, for amusement was sometimes sought in unconventional ways. On one Halloween night in the early thirties, a cow was led up the stairs to the third floor of Old College Hall. Since a cow by nature may ascend steps but consistently refuses to descend, it was subsequently necessary to lower the imprisoned animal from the third-floor window by means of a crane. At a faculty meeting in 1937, some male students confessed to breaking electric light bulbs and a window pane at a women’s dormitory. Another student stated that “he had left the tacks in President Robb’s chair on the stage while working on scenery.” In 1938, a male student was asked to leave school for throwing water in Petty-Manker Hall. The above incidents constitute only a few examples of the fact that the difficult task of getting a college education was not always approached grimly and with sober countenances.<sup>36</sup>

As one reads through the school records of the hard years of the Great Depression, one is certainly made aware of the serious economic problems faced by the college. However, coming through even more strongly is an awareness of a vivacious and talented student body guided by a well-trained, dedicated faculty. In the weekly faculty meetings some discussion naturally centered around financial problems, but much more was concerned with improvement of instruction and service to the students and to the community. The small church-related college in Athens has existed, under different names, since 1857 and has been troubled by financial problems from its beginning until the present time. It has also been blessed with dedication and an indomitable, sacrificial spirit on the part of its faculty and administrative officers and with exceptionally strong community support. These factors enabled the college to survive during the Great Depression and are carrying it forward today.

## NOTES

1. **Tennessee Wesleyan College Catalog**, 1929-33.
2. **Ibid.**, 1929-39.
3. **Ibid.**, 1929-30, 1939-40.
4. **Faculty Minutes**, Tennessee Wesleyan College, 2 April 1934, 13 February 1939.
5. **Catalog.**, 1929-30.
6. **Ibid.**, 1929-39.
7. **Ibid.**, 1929-31.
8. **Ibid.**, 1931-32.
9. **Athens Daily Post-Athenian**, 8 July 1932.
10. **Ibid.**
11. **Catalog.**, 1930-36.
12. LeRoy A. Martin, **A History of Tennessee Wesleyan College: 1857-1957** (n.p., 1957), 135-137.
13. **Ibid.**, 138.
14. **Faculty Minutes**, 8 February 1932.
15. **Ibid.**
16. **Ibid.**
17. **Ibid.**, 23 February 1932.
18. **Ibid.**, 9 March 1933; **Nocatula**, Tennessee Wesleyan College, advertisement, Summer 1930.
19. Claryse D. Myers, letter to author, 1 May 1983.
20. **Ibid.**
21. **Faculty Minutes**, 1 April 1935.
22. **Ibid.**, 25 February 1935.
23. **Martin, History**, 139.
24. **Ibid.**, 140.
25. Howard Bales, interview, 6 July 1983.
26. **Faculty Minutes**, 4 October 1937.
27. **Ibid.**, 9 September 1935, 21 September 1936; J. Huse Martin, interview, 24 June 1983.
28. **Faculty Minutes**, 20 September 1930, 15 May 1933, 15 January, 16 April 1934.
29. **Ibid.**, 13 April 1936, 2 October 1939; **Catalog**, 1929-32; **Nocatula**, 1930.
30. **Faculty Minutes**, 18 May 1936, 21 March 1938; **Nocatula**, 1937.
31. **Nocatula**, 1932-37; **Faculty Minutes**, 3 February 1936; **Martin, History**, 218.
32. **Nocatula**, 1935, 1937.
33. **Ibid.**, 1930; **Faculty Minutes**, 14 January 1935.
34. **Catalog**, 1929-30; **Nocatula**, 1930.
35. Judge Fred Puett, interview, 5 December 1981.
36. **Ibid.**, **Faculty Minutes**, 26 January 1937, 17 May 1938.



## **Chapter 6**

# **THE DEPRESSION GOES TO CHURCH**

**By Jeanne Taggart**

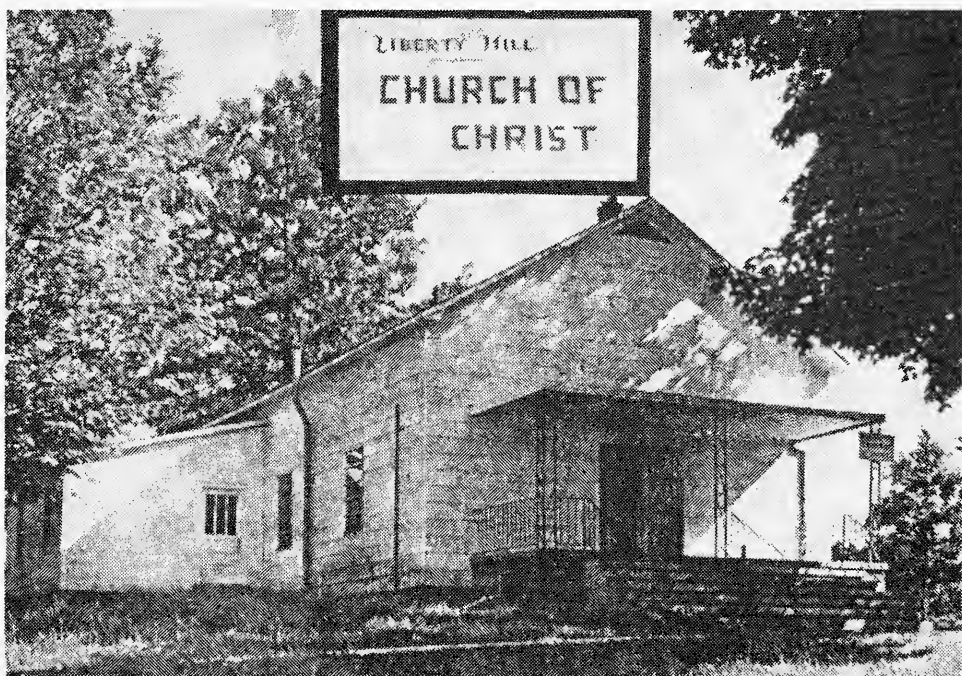
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The economic collapse in 1929 had a profound effect on the churches of McMinn County. The impact paralleled the effect on families and communities in that all churches were affected by the Depression, but some more than others. Hard times altered church growth patterns, severely strained church finances, increased social awareness, and produced a form of spiritual re-awakening.

When the Depression hit, most of the county's churches had just completed a successful decade of spiritual leadership which saw an increase in membership, the formation of new congregations, and the erection of several new buildings. In all, there were 93 churches, 81 white and 12 black, with a membership at the beginning of the 1930's of just over 11,000, which represented 38 percent of the population. Church leaders looked back with pride to their accomplishments in the 1920's and confidently looked forward to an even better decade in the 1930's.<sup>1</sup>

By the middle of 1930, however, most churches began to feel the pinch of the Depression. A noticeable decline in contributions caused considerable concern among church leaders in those churches which were in debt for church buildings as a result of expansion in the previous decade. Both town and country congregations struggled to meet the financial crisis, but rural churches were especially hard hit. Farm families, the mainstay of these churches, were in an economic bind due to low farm prices, and thus were unable to provide the necessary financial support to the church.

During the height of the Depression, in 1932-1934, church contributions fell to an all-time low, causing individual churches to curtail further expansion and to seek ways of dealing with the ever-increasing crisis. The Baptists, the largest denomination in the county, saw contributions fall from \$119,000 in 1929 to \$21,800 in 1933. By 1940, contributions still had not regained 1929 levels. Methodists, the second largest denomination, were in the same deplorable state of affairs. In 1929, total giving came to \$42,000, but fell to \$21,600 by 1933. Other denominations in the county suffered accordingly. Contributions in many small churches were pitifully small. Zack Daugherty, whose grandfather, the Reverend William Daugherty, was pastor of the Liberty Hill Church of Christ, recalled that giving in his church on many Sundays did not exceed 50 cents.<sup>2</sup>



Liberty Hill Church of Christ.

The financial crisis of local churches reached beyond McMinn County. Support for church benevolence and mission projects throughout the state, nation, and foreign countries was curtailed as local congregations, burdened with their own concerns, cut back on expenditures for these projects. In 1933, the Annual Conference of the Methodist Church, North, reported that World Service giving was down 27 percent, and as a result, the Church had to recall about one-half of its missionaries at home and abroad. Local Methodist congregations were able to raise only 25 percent

of their World Service quota for that year. Struggling under pressing local problems, many churches were forced to neglect church concerns beyond their own local congregations.<sup>3</sup>

For some congregations, the major concern was how to retire the indebtedness of the church; for others, it was a matter of upkeep of buildings. Strong fears were raised that some houses of worship might be lost due to bankruptcy. Conference leadership of the Methodist Church admonished local congregations not to create debts that could not be repaid "without embarrassment." Officials warned, "It is better to worship in a moderate church than to erect buildings beyond the means of a congregation."<sup>4</sup>

Hard times brought church construction in the county almost to a standstill. Most churches postponed expansion plans until the end of the Depression.

The First Baptist of Athens was one of those churches. Although membership grew during the 1930's, the congregation had to struggle to meet financial obligations, frequently borrowing from local banks and individuals to keep the church solvent. With the need of expanding the growing church, a campaign was begun in the summer of 1937, with E.L. Willson as chairman, to raise sufficient money to pay off the church's entire indebtedness of \$2,604.88. Funds were slow coming in, however, and it was not until early 1939 that the treasurer was able to report that "every debt owed" had been paid. The congregation then began to plan in earnest for a new building. In early 1940, a committee, consisting of H.A. Vestal, chairman, James Willson, C.C. Hoback, Henry Thompson, and Harold List, was appointed to promote a new building program. A canvass of members indicated that approximately \$15,000 could be raised that year to apply toward a new building. Several building sites were considered with the congregation choosing the Fisher property, which was obtained for \$11,700. In May, the congregation approved a building campaign with a goal of \$20,000 to be reached by the end of the year, but stipulated that building operations were not to begin until the full amount was raised. By June, the building fund exceeded \$16,000, and in September the church accepted a bid of \$46,967 by Worsham Brothers of Knoxville. A committee was appointed to secure a loan for the balance.<sup>5</sup>

A few churches undertook building programs during the Depression. In 1932, the North Athens Methodist Church was enlarged by the addition of four Sunday School rooms and an auditorium with church members supplying most of the labor. New Baptist churches were erected at Oak Grove and North Athens, and in 1939, a new Methodist church was built at Jones Chapel.<sup>6</sup>

While some churches did undertake building projects during the Depression, most congregations had to content themselves with making repairs to existing structures and generally making do with what they had. Even the cost of small repairs was a problem for some

congregations, especially those in rural areas. The Hiwassee Baptist Church undertook to repair the floor at a cost of \$8.50. The Sunday offering, which normally went to pay the preacher, had to be used instead to pay the debt, but it only came to \$3.85. It took several Sunday offerings before enough money was raised to pay the debt for materials.<sup>7</sup>

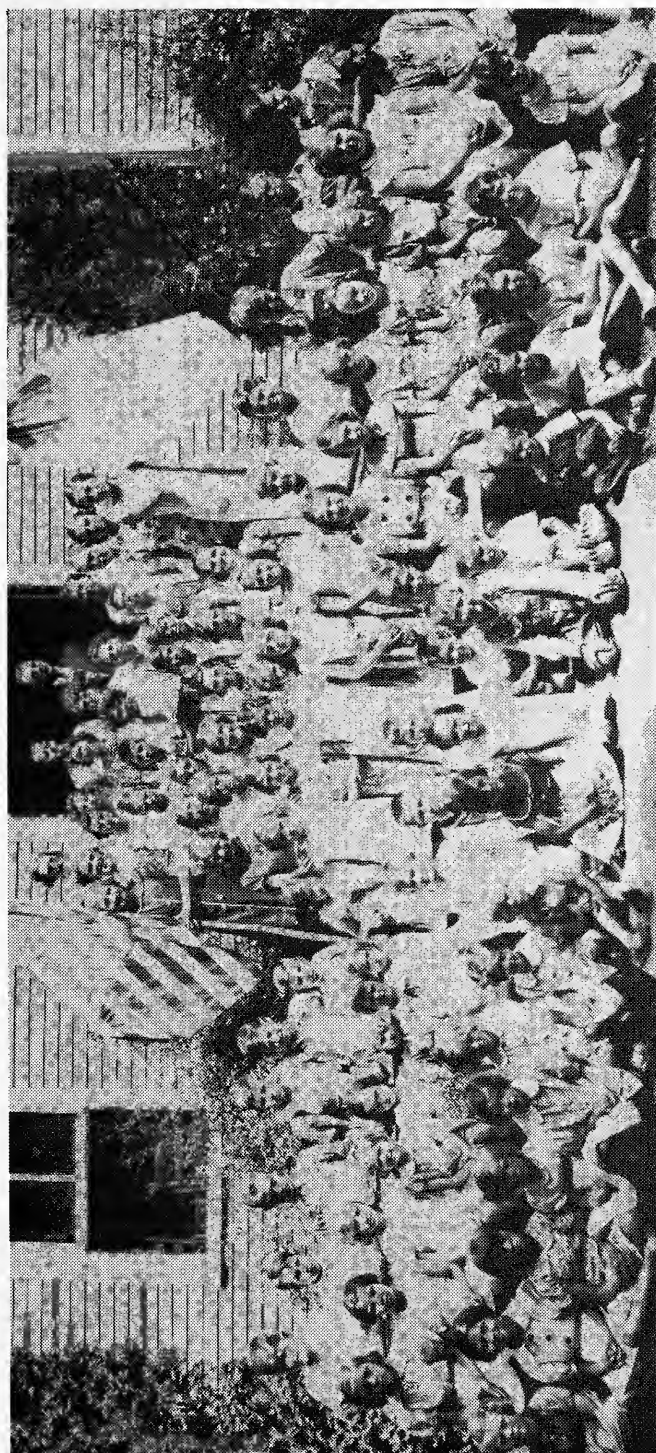
In contrast to the financial problems that plagued most local congregations, Professor W.E. Nash reported that the program of United Presbyterian Church in Athens was not too adversely affected by the Depression, since it operated as a mission church supported by the United Presbyterian Board of Missions, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The Board of Missions paid the pastor's salary with no reduction throughout the Depression. In addition, clothing was sent to be dispensed to the needy. Whatever collections were received were sent to Pittsburgh, a practice that continued until 1958.<sup>8</sup>

One method frequently resorted to by many churches to reduce expenses was the reduction of the pastor's salary. Many preachers voluntarily asked that their salaries be cut in an effort to balance budgets and to keep their churches afloat. In 1932, when it became evident that Mars Hill Presbyterian Church of Athens could not meet its budget, the minister, the Reverend N.W. Kuykendall, asked that his salary be reduced from \$2,100 to \$1,900. After a canvass of the membership, it was found that this sum could not be raised and the minister agreed to accept \$1,500. The church's financial condition continued to deteriorate and in 1935 reach its lowest when it could only offer \$850. By 1938, however, finances had improved somewhat and the Reverend Kuykendall's salary



**Mars Hill Presbyterian Church and manse in the 1930's.**

**Courtesy of Mars Hill Presbyterian Church**



First Vacation Bible School of Niota Baptist Church (now First Baptist Church, Niota) Picture made in front of the Church on July 7, 1938

- Row 1: Maxine Reed, Martha Jo Black, Loisten Russell, Elizabeth Ann Dake, Sue Snyder, Bobby Knox, Patsy Lones, R.B. Dake, Mamie Jo Wilson, Martha Lou Turner, John Lones, Junior Knox, Ross Turner, Bobby Clark, Eva Mae Hicks, Mary Ellen Clemmer, Joe Snyder, Lucy Clark.
- Row 2: Virginia Knox, Mary Gladys Hicks, Betty Jo Brady, Martha Ann Dake, Frances Kyker, Trindle Dilbeck (head only), Hazel Clark, Edythe Fox, Bobby Orr, Kenneth Archer, Donald Wallis (partly hidden), Jack Clark, Martha Haskins, Mary Jane Snyder, Joy Marie Staley, Mary Frances Harrington, Albertine Kyker, Carolyn Foster, Elnora Milsaps.
- Row 3: Homer Shamblin, Bill Snyder, Earl DeWitt, Bill Archer, Charles Miller, Edward Carrol, Jerry Lowry, Evelyn Knox, Theresa Haskins, Mary Fox, Joyce Billings (head only), Hazel Johnson, Gena Culbertson, Francis Forrest Dunn, Billy Samples, Kenneth Milsaps, W.G. Dake, Harry Delashmitt.
- Row 4: Ruby Kate DeWitt, Jean Knox, Lady Ruth Neil, Blanche Carrol, Dorsa Lorraine Johnson, Vera Lee Knox.
- Row 5: Melba Large, Wesley Hicks (partly hidden), Warner Archer, Bill Knox.
- Row 6: Lucille Hicks (holding the American flag), Urias Milsaps, Alvin Fox, Jr., Grace Foster (holding the Bible), Mrs. Elizabeth Snyder Harrington, Herschel McNabb.
- Row 7: Juanita Neil, Ruby Lee Archer, Mrs. Juliette McCorkle Thompson (partly hidden), Miss Dorothy Rose Forrest, Miss Mary Sue Forrest, Mrs. Hazel Foster Webb, Betty June Hicks, Ardelle Milsaps, Alice Fox (holding the Christian flag).
- Row 8: Sue Turner, J.W. Milsaps, Rev. Hugh F. Ensminger, Pastor.

Courtesy of Mrs. Frank Harrington

was increased to \$1,200, but still \$900 less than it had been in 1929. Similar pay cuts took place in other congregations.<sup>9</sup>

The sacrifices and services of pastors and their families are remembered with great appreciation and affection by members of the churches they served. Mrs. A.C. Huber, a member of Mars Hill, recalled that the Reverend Kuydendall was a "beloved pastor," not only by his church, but by the entire community. Though he was called on constantly to reduce his income, he and his family graciously shared what they had with the many needy that came to their door for help. Despite limited resources, his children were all college educated and became well-known professionals in their fields. Other churches reported similar stories. As late as 1940, ministers' salaries had not reached 1929 levels.<sup>10</sup>

Although church members could not meet their financial obligations to their pastors during the Depression, they found other ways to compensate them for their services. Food was plentiful, and no minister's family went hungry. Church "poundings" were frequently held, and members gladly shared vegetables, canned goods, and meat with ministers. Sometimes people, if they could afford it, bought something to bring to the poundings. Usually the most economical item they could purchase was a five cent box of soda, and as a result, ministers received a lot of soda. The Reverend Burch Cooper, a Baptist minister for 53 years, related the story of a Methodist minister friend who one day remarked that he had received so much baking soda that if he had ever gotten buttermilk and the baking soda together he would have been blown as high as the clouds.<sup>11</sup>

Visiting revival ministers were paid for their services also by pounding. Usually the minister stayed in a home in the community in which the revival was held. At the end of the revival it was customary for everyone to bring something for the preacher. W.I. Farmer, a retired Methodist minister, recalled with great enjoyment a special revival during the Depression at the Piney Grove Methodist Church. On the night before the revival was to end, a man in the congregation stood up and declared, "We don't have any money, but we want to do something for Brother Farmer. Tomorrow night, I want everyone to bring some food." On the next night, the minister was blessed with a good supply of canned goods and vegetables. He thanked the congregation and was about to begin preaching when a little boy walked down the aisle carrying a large pumpkin. He came right up front, put the pumpkin on the communion table, looked up, and said, "Brother Farmer, mammy said to give you this." The Reverend Farmer dubbed this his "Pumpkin Revival" and maintained it was the best revival he ever held.<sup>12</sup>

Farmer also shared fond memories of another revival at Blevins Chapel. This congregation held a pounding, and in addition to receiving the usual canned food, potatoes, and fruit, he also received 12 gallons of molasses. Next morning at breakfast he opened one of the cans, and to his



dismay, all 12 cans had turned to sugar. However, with the usual ingenuity that flourished during the Depression, he was able to swap them for gas — a gallon of molasses for a gallon of gas.<sup>13</sup>

Ministers were also assisted by the generosity of church members, who often brought food to their homes. Charles Runyon, a retired Baptist minister, received so many live chickens that he had to build a shed to hold them. Other people gave Runyon an extra 50 cents or \$1.00 when they could afford it. The generosity of ladies at the Christenburg and Eastanallee Baptist churches was appreciated by the pastor. A few women in the congregation gave "Sunday eggs" to the minister — i.e., eggs the hens had laid on Sunday. On one occasion the pastor overheard a woman telling her friend that if she gave her eggs to the minister her hens might be better layers. She insisted that her hens "did better" on Sunday than on any other day of the week. If a store owner was a member of the church, the minister might receive something from the store. The ledger of the Wattenbarger Store, owned by Chris and Grace Wattenbarger in the Pine Grove community, revealed that the minister was frequently given gas for his car and other necessities.<sup>14</sup>



**Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, 1935.**

**Courtesy of Bonnie Clayton**

Congregations frequently shared pastors during the Depression, especially smaller churches that could not afford to employ full-time ministers. Thus members visited another church some Sundays. Colonel W.W. Eledge related such an arrangement between the Baptist and Methodist church in Englewood. On two Sundays a month the members

would go to the other church for preaching. "There was a marvelous rapport," said Eledge. "We would sing in each other's choir and even swap choir leaders if one had to be absent." Calhoun, Niota, and other communities reported similar arrangements.<sup>15</sup>

During the early Depression years, many people turned away from the church. The reasons were varied. Lack of proper clothing forced some to stop attending; pre-occupation with making a living kept others away; and indifference, resulting from the Depression, caused still others to drop out. Pastors were keenly aware of the burdens suffered by their constituents, and they redoubled their efforts to provide spiritual comfort and encouragement during the trying times. Ministers also frequently assisted in obtaining clothing and food for those without. The Reverend Farmer related several stories of hardships he encountered among members of his congregations. While he was visiting in the home of a church member, the woman said, "I believe my husband would come to church if he had a suit. I'm a seamstress; if I had an old suit, I could make it to fit him." Farmer found a suit within his congregation and took it to the lady. Her husband was a rather tall man, and the sleeves of the coat were two inches too short. The next Sunday, the man showed up at church. As it turned out, he was the best dressed man in the congregation in his "custom tailored suit."<sup>16</sup>

The Reverend Farmer also recalled the story of a tenant farmer, his wife, and two children. Dry weather had destroyed the man's cotton crop, and he was very discouraged and lonely. The minister spent the night with him to give him encouragement. The next morning at the breakfast table, he talked about how dependable God was. The tenant farmer made a decision to put his trust in the Lord; the family went to the creek and was baptized that morning. All joined the church and later the man became the Sunday School superintendent.<sup>17</sup>

The pastor also remembered spending the night with a man and his wife who were in desperate circumstances. The family was so poor that at breakfast they had to drink coffee out of pint fruit jars. They had no cups nor knives, only a fork and spoon. The woman apologized, but Farmer, to put them at ease, replied, "I was brought up this way. In fact, my wife makes me drink out of a cup without handles." The family relaxed and enjoyed breakfast together. The result was that the man joined the church the following Sunday.<sup>18</sup>

The despair and helplessness felt by many during the Depression was illustrated by the Reverend Farmer as he told of two other incidents. As he stood on the porch of a farmer he was visiting, the man said, "Look at my fences. I don't have encouragement to go out and clean the fence rows. I'm letting honeysuckle take them." Another man had not mowed his yard all summer. When the minister asked, "Don't you think you should mow your yard?" the man replied, "What's the use? I feel it is a hopeless situation."<sup>19</sup>

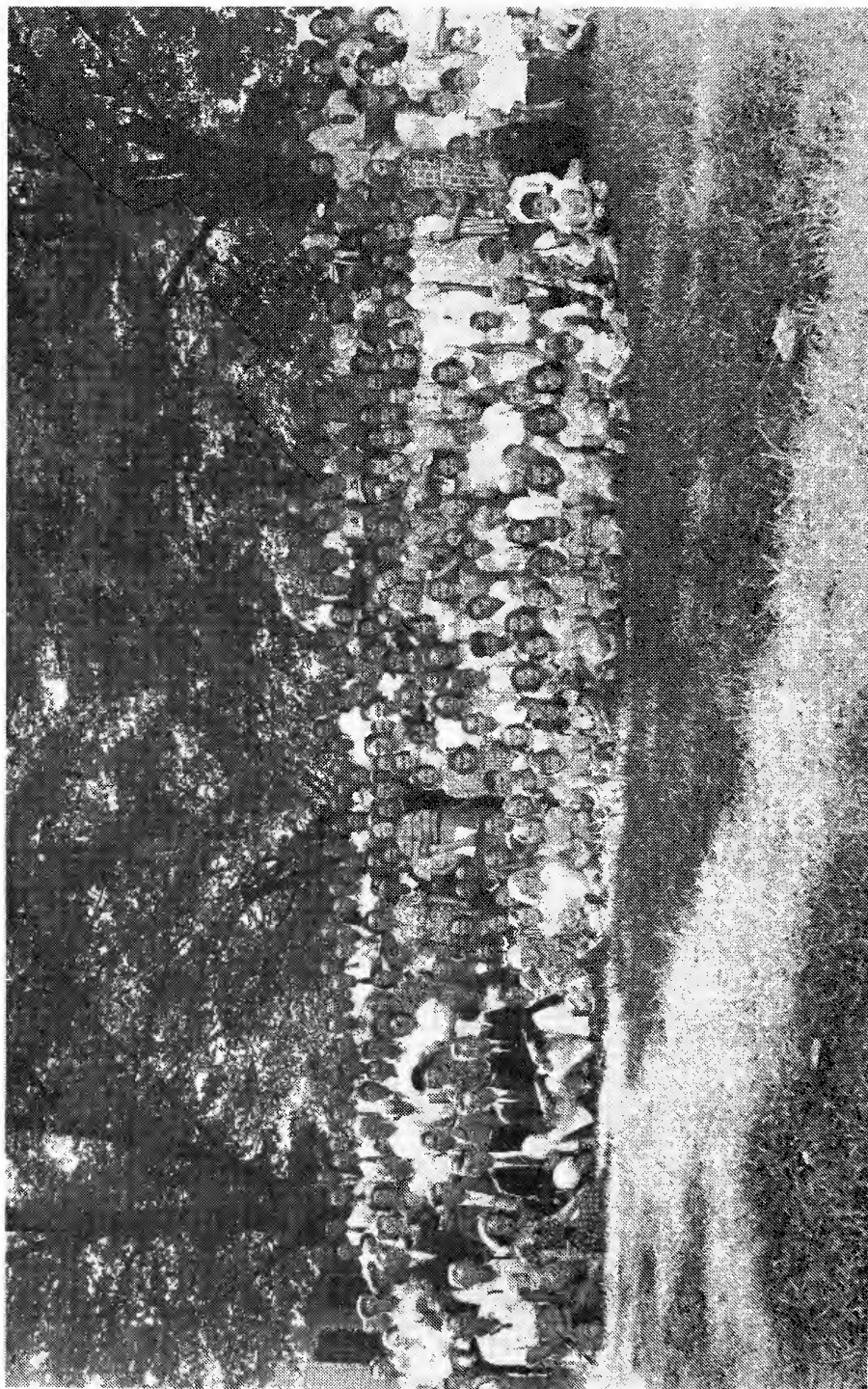


The Reverend Runyon recalled similar experiences that revealed hardships suffered by many, but sometimes with an amusing twist. While visiting in the home of a deacon, he was asked to give the blessing at the table. After he had returned thanks, the man looked up at him and said, "Preacher, you see what's before you; eat it if you can, but if you can't don't mess over it because we have got to eat it." Charles Jaquish told a story related to him by J. Monroe Ball, Methodist minister at Englewood during the 1930's. Ball told of marrying a young couple, and after the ceremony, the young man said, "Preacher, I don't have any money to pay you, but I have a butcher knife I made out of a saw blade, and I'd like to give it to you for marrying us." The minister took the knife. And so the stories go on. Such illustrations describe what hard times were like.<sup>20</sup>

As the Depression deepened and as material possessions became more scarce, many individuals began to look for aid and comfort in the spiritual realm. Particularly during 1932 and 1933, an unprecedented number of conversions, followed by increased church membership and attendance, took place in revival after revival throughout the county. At Etowah during the months of January and February, 1932, a month-long revival involving churches of all denominations resulted in scores of conversions. Church leaders called it the "greatest revival in Etowah history." Services were rotated from church to church with ministers preaching twice daily to overflow crowds. People were urged not to stay away on account of lack of clothing, but to wear whatever they had. Each Friday night was designated as "overall night" with the minister preaching from the pulpit in overalls.<sup>21</sup>

Other revivals with "unusual results" were reported. Following a successful two-week revival at the East Athens Baptist Church, with over 100 conversions, the pastor, D.C. Watson, stated that the people "are seeking comfort through a religious channel." He noted that many had been following a busy routine that diverted their attention to other matters, but hard times had caused them to reflect on "something more serious than the matter of daily work." The North Etowah Baptist Church, after an eight-week revival, reported 127 confessions with 73 additions to the church. The North Athens Baptist Church also reported a record number of conversions, over 100, after a three-week revival. In April, 1933, the Seventh Day Adventists concluded a revival, conducted by the Reverend H.F. Taylor of Savannah, Georgia, with attendance "exceeding the seating capacity." The minister's sermons dealt with "Hard Times," using special scriptural passages and said to be the most "outstanding illustrations" ever heard. During the darkest days of the Depression, the church provided a ray of light, offering spiritual strength and comfort for many who had lost hope.<sup>22</sup>

Besides providing food for the soul, churches also were important social centers during the 1930's, providing needed recreational and social activities. Homecoming, always a favorite, with preaching, singing and



Revival at Niota led by Evangelist Lee Emory.

Courtesy of Jim Brakebill

dinner on the ground, was well-attended with some rural churches reporting as many as 1,000 to 2,000 in attendance. Zack Daugherty recalled that homecoming attendance at Liberty Hill Church of Christ was as high as 1,500 and that wagons and buggies covered the hillsides surrounding the church. Picnics, ice cream suppers, watermelon slicings, pot luck suppers, plays, hayrides and all-day singings provided fun and enjoyment to people who did not have the means to "buy" entertainment and thus helped to relieve the monotony of the Depression.<sup>23</sup>

Churches were especially concerned over the welfare of the youth of the community and made every effort to provide wholesome and entertaining activities for them. Church leaders were vitally concerned that idleness, brought on by the Depression, would lead young people astray, and they worked hard to fill leisure time with meaningful activities through organized youth groups such as Baptist Young People's Union, the Methodist Epworth League and others. In 1932, membership in the BYPU was reported to be approximately 1,000. Youth groups were well-attended and were effective in keeping a large number of young people occupied throughout the 1930's.<sup>24</sup>

Often young people built their recreation around the Depression. For example, the youth at the United Presbyterian Church in Athens had a "depression social." An unusual course was served consisting of lemonade, cornbread and beans. The youth reported a delightful time. Imagination and ingenuity by the Niota Epworth League produced a most unusual kind of depression activity in October, 1932. A unique football game pitting "Gloom" against "Happiness" was played with "Happiness" outscoring its opponent. Billed as their "hardest game" of the season, each team had a group of rooters cheering loudly for their side.

Those cheering the loudest for the "Gloom" players were a bunch of "long-faced" folk who believed that nothing good ever happened. On the opposition side of the field were the loyal rooters of the "Happiness" team consisting of that happy, congenial, friendly group of young people who called themselves the "Niota Epworth Leaguers." Careful watching of each play made it easy to determine the outstanding players on each team. "Gloom's" best men were Old Man Depression, Hard Luck, Bad Humor, Illness, Poor Excuse, No Work, and Chilly Weather. But still more outstanding were some of the "Happiness" players — Good Nature, Congeniality, Friendliness, Cheerfulness, Fun and Energy. "Happiness" made touchdown after touchdown and finally completely banished the "Gloom" team from the field. At the sign of victory, the Epworth Leaguers swooped down upon the "Happiness" team and carried each player with them to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Charlie Dake for an evening of fun and frolic. These young people were not about to let hard times dampen their spirits.<sup>25</sup>

The Depression brought about a change in the character of women's organizations within the churches. Formerly study groups and fellowship

groups, they became actively involved in providing relief during the thirties. These organizations assisted in searching out those in need and providing them with food and clothing. Sewing workshops were also conducted at which garments were made for the underprivileged from material supplied by the Red Cross.

Women's organizations also were active in assisting churches in raising funds to help pay off mortgages and to make improvements in church buildings and parsonages. One such group was the women's group at the Methodist Church, North, at Etowah where the ladies held a "country store," rummage sales and once a week served dinners to the Lions Club.<sup>26</sup>

As the thirties drew to a close, the churches of McMinn County could reflect on the past decade as one of mixed blessings. At the beginning of the Depression, many had faltered, tottered a little, but steadied and dug in for the duration. The church — congregations and faithful ministers — stood "tall" in alleviating the suffering of the poor and needy, in providing spiritual comfort and support for those facing difficult and depressing circumstances, and in maintaining social and recreational programs that nurtured the fellowship and provided an outlet for wholesome activities and rewarding service. "Hard times" for the church? Of course! Some had to disband or drastically curtail their services. Many people, disillusioned and depressed, turned away from organized religion and did not return; but for the most part, the churches emerged from the low points to new highs of membership and service. "Caring" and "sharing" best characterize the Depression years of the church. Challenges were met. Commitments required sacrifices from ministers and members, but the churches grew in membership, expanding their efforts of mission and Christian purpose as the Depression began to fade away.

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